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*Triestestas y Esperanza: The Educational Voices of Six Mexican American
Students in a California Urban High School*

Frank Jimenez

University of Redlands

UNIVERSITY OF REDLANDS
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

This dissertation, written by

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Under the direction of the dissertation committee and approved by all its members, this dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **DOCTOR OF EDUCATION**.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to the students of Rialto High School. For the last 7 years, the students of RHS have served as an inspiration in my daily pursuit of trying to make their lives better. During this time, I have watched some of you grow from freshmen to seniors. I have witnessed you laugh and cry. I have heard your stories of joy and sadness. I have held your babies and been witness to some of the happiest moments of your life. Our shared experiences were the foundation of this effort.

This work is dedicated to my wife, [REDACTED], and my two children, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. With your words, smiles, and hugs I have been able to weather the many storms that this process of getting my EdD has presented me. Without you, none of this would have ever come to fruition. Thank you, [REDACTED], and always remember, girls, Daddy loves you.

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To my family, these 3.5 years of me going to school and working on assignments have made it difficult for us to enjoy our time together. [REDACTED], we met in our master's program at U of R in 2002. Since this time, I have finished my teaching credential, administrative credential, and now my EdD. During this time, you have been there to assist me with anything that I needed. I know how difficult it must have been to take care of the kids all those nights. [REDACTED], this degree will hopefully serve as a guiding point for you to always understand the importance of education. Throughout your lives you may have elements of your lives taken away; however, no entity can ever take away the knowledge you receive as a result of what you choose to learn.

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the lives and experiences of six Mexican American (MA) students in a California urban high school. Narratives taken from the students involved different topics, such as family/community influences on school, experiences encountered at Rialto High School (RHS), challenges and success at RHS, faculty support and limitations at RHS, and what can be done to improve the experiences of students at RHS. The theoretical perspective of Latino critical theory and the narrative inquiry approach provided the foundation for this study. The individual narratives of the six participants uncovered a variety of both shared and unshared experiences of the difficulties they encounter as students at RHS. From these narratives, it is evident that new socio/political/economic reforms are needed to provide educational equality to the millions of MA high school students that find themselves in low-performing urban high schools.

Chapter One

Introduction

I left Rialto High School because I wasn't going to any of my classes. I wasn't motivated. It was like I was bored in school so I left for awhile. I got so sick of having to catch rides or the bus so I just stayed home. I began to find friends who were doing the same so I really didn't think that I was doing anything wrong. Much like me my friends were behind in credits and figured that school was hopeless. As far as my parents they really didn't say anything to me. Occasionally they would mention that they were upset that I wasn't attending school but I really think that was because the attendance office was calling so much. Finally, after about six months of missing school I woke up one morning and decided that I had to do something different. Not because someone else motivated me or anything, but because I was getting bored staying with my friends at home. I have returned back to school. Going into this senior year I have to find some way to make up 70 credits to graduate. I am happy to be back and really do think that I can graduate this May.

—Lenny Corzo, Senior

The comments of Lenny Corzo reflect the enormity of problems that Mexican American (MA) students often encounter today in public schools. Feelings of hopelessness and mistrust of the system run rampant for thousands of students similar to Lenny, who honestly think that they cannot function in the public school system (Arias, 2006).

This problem can be traced throughout California's history as generations of MA students have been excluded from quality forms of education. Augmenting this problem further are the relational aspects of socioeconomic dysfunction that accompany the MA experience in California. The various forms of circumstances affecting the education of MA students in California were the focus of this study.

Statement of the Problem

MA students have not traditionally fared well in American public high schools. Their problems have been well documented by many researchers (Arias, 1986; Bean & Tineda, 1997; Carter & Segura, 1979; Olivas, 1986; Valencia, 2001). Many attempts have been made to explain the reasons why so many MA students fail at the secondary level in the United States. In general, research on the condition of education of MA students has focused on issues such as segregation, attrition, school finance, language, and bilingual education and testing. To have a deeper understanding of what is causing the widespread failure of MA students, there has to be an explanation that goes beyond this usual list of problems (Valdes, 1995).

Mexican-origin students are, in terms of their school performance, part of a much larger population that includes the disadvantaged, the at-risk, and the underprivileged. To accurately discuss school failure of MA students, there must be a concentrated effort to frame the discussion along a new framework that focuses primarily on the ghettoization of high schools in California urban areas (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

Purpose

The importance of this research lies in uncovering the hard truths that accompany the experiences of MA students in urban high schools. The research was conducted as a narrative inquiry in order to better understand the experiences of six MA students in their

senior year of high school. This study highlights the difficulties that many of these students face within the broken public school system that they attend, as well as the dysfunctional social structures (poverty, unemployment, low wages, high crime, rampant drug use) of the community that surrounds them.

Overarching Research Question

The following was the main question examined in this study: How do six MA high school students describe their lives and experiences in an urban California public high school?

This study provided an avenue of discourse for students' voices to be heard. The focal point of the research was that the students' voices are rich forms of information to add to educational theory, policy, practice, and most importantly, provide a more in-depth understanding of their plight. According to Sperling and Appleman (2011), there are five distinct constructs of voice:

1. Voice as Individual Accomplishment: Students' ability to explain their thoughts, feelings, and emotions creates an ownership of their lived experiences that brings meaning to who they are as individuals.
2. Voice as Rhetorical: The use of voice in research should be seen as a rhetorical gesture that takes into account the social contexts to which the information is being attained. The individual consciousness of the research subject is constantly in flux as a result of the tasks (written submissions, interviews, group discussions) that are being asked of him/her. This creates an identity performance by the research subject that needs to be documented in its original manner.

3. Voice as Linguistic: This construct of voice examines the role of culture in influencing what a particular individual has to document or verbally express about him/herself. The realization that culture is experienced differently by different individuals allows for strict attention to be paid to what the individual is trying to express. The intonation of words, facial contortions, and voice inflections individuals use to orally explain themselves is taken into account just as their use of grammar, word choice, and writing style is used to explain who they are in written form.
4. Voice as a Social/Cultural Accomplishment: The written and verbal communication of an individual is a direct representation of the culture that the person belongs to. From day-to-day conversations with individuals and/or groups to written or technological messages, the voice of an individual is made up of what he/she has been exposed to.
5. Voice as Ideological: The voices that are produced as a result of one's social context directly correlate with maintaining an individual's social position. The means of communication an individual uses greatly reflect where and how a person is able to express him/herself. An individual who has been exposed to vast streams of information and has been accurately taught how to communicate this information is constantly able to subjugate others who were not privy to this similar process. This then creates social structures where individuals who act collectively use their voices to silence others by using superior forms of communication.

Research Questions

1. What impact does the history of MAs in California have on their current condition in California's public school system?

The first question looked directly at the historical conditions of MA students and how the negative consequences of this experience continue to affect the way MA students

are educated today. This historical journey focused on four distinct time periods:

(a) 1900-1947—de jure segregation of MA students in California schools; (b) 1947-1965—de facto segregation of MA students in California schools; (c) 1965-1980—the radicalization of Chicano students in California; (d) 1980-2008—political conservatism and its effects on MA students in California (Gonzalez, 1990).

2. How do conditions related to poverty contribute to the problems associated with low achievement amongst MA students?

The second question examined the conditions of poverty that directly contribute to patterns of low achievement in school. Research on income in urban areas showed that 38% of Latino men and a staggering 50% of Latino women earned poverty-level wages (Anyon, 2005). Research on jobs indicated that 77% of all new and projected jobs in urban centers will be low paying (Anyon, 2005). Research on the concentration of wealth showed that 85% of Latino workers in urban areas made wages at or near the official poverty line, which as of 2011 was considered to be a family unit of four that makes less than \$22,050 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). This number correlates with those in urban areas in California who are receiving a free or reduced lunch. As of 2010-2011, an alarming 83% of students living in urban areas receive a free or reduced lunch (Simas, 2011).

According to Enchautegui (1997), the main connection between poverty and low achievement in school is that students who are mired in poverty often have parents who work tirelessly to make enough money for the house to stay in order. With the parents being gone for long periods of time during the day, there is less time for parents to be actively involved with school.

3. What factors lead MA students down the road of failure in California urban high schools?

The third question probed three reasons (at-risk schools, lack of qualified teachers, and inappropriate teaching practices) behind Latino school failure. The first and most pressing reason examined was at-risk schools, a term that refers to institutions that are poorly maintained with instructors who may not be qualified. According to Waxman (1992a), there are common characteristics of at-risk schools that consist of the following: (a) alienation of students and teachers; (b) inferior standards and low quality of education; (c) classrooms that are irresponsive to students' needs; (d) high truancy rates and persistent discipline problems. The second reason looked at was the lack of qualified teachers in urban schools that educate large percentages of MA students. This hard-to-explain reason deals mainly with teachers not having enough training on how to teach MA students who have difficulties with learning English. Gersten and Rodriguez (1997) reported that nearly 63% of all secondary teachers in urban California school districts have at least one English Language Learner student in their class, but only 20% of the teachers are ESL certified. The final and perhaps the most important reason why so many MA students head down the road to failure in California urban high schools is the inappropriate teaching practices that are used. Studies by Waxman (1992a) and Padron and Waxman (1999) showed that authoritative-based teaching practices were prevalent in many inner-city high schools. These studies uncovered that these teaching practices proved to be highly ineffective, particularly in the areas of math and science.

Significance of the Study

In the study of Anyon's work in *Ghetto Schooling* (1997), *Radical Possibilities* (2005), and other related works, it became apparent that much of the discourse focused on the historical/educational experiences of African Americans and Hispanics (Puerto Ricans) in schools located on the East Coast (Newark, New Jersey). This study is an attempt to bridge the findings of Anyon with the socioeducational experiences of MA students in California.

Applying the theoretical framework of Anyon's ghettoization of schools to what is encountered by MA students in California offers a comparison that is needed to explore the geographical, historical, racial, and economic differences that are associated with ghetto schooling. While MA students in urban areas share similar conditions of poverty, there are stark differences (immigration patterns, cultural norms, socioeconomic identities) from other minority groups that fall under the same classifications (Rosales, 1995).

Specifically, the study showed how the failure of MA students in low-achieving urban schools is not a consequence of cultural traditions that do not value education or generations of failed education policy as many pundits of research in education document (Arias, 2006; Cavazos, 1999). Rather, the plight of MA students in urban centers is a result of decades of socioeconomic negligence that has left their existence in the United States on the periphery.

No longer can urban school districts that serve MA students be blamed for poor testing, teacher competency, and functionality of school leadership. A new discourse that focuses on job creation, income equality, and upward socioeconomic mobility needs to

come to the forefront to adequately deal with the myriad problems that confront the MA student in California (Anyon, 1995).

Definitions of Terms

Attribution of opportunity. Societal change that encourages social protest, where individuals must view political/economic developments as opportunities for waging struggle.

AVID. An elective course found in high schools where the main purpose is to close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college and success in a global society.

Concentration of wealth. An economic phenomenon that refers to the large separation of wealth between the rich and the poor.

Distribution of poverty. Term that explains how poverty is equated and differentiated in areas of poverty and its connection to school funds.

Educational disparity. Differences in funding between poor urban school districts and affluent school districts located in the suburbs.

Foundational educational reform. School reform that focuses on regional job creation, adequate transportation systems, housing, and municipal tax reforms.

Gear UP. A federal/state discretionary grant program that is designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in [postsecondary](#) education.

Ghetto schooling. Term that describes school sites that contain the following negative characteristics: high minority populations, poor facilities, shell-shocked teachers, apathetic students, low levels of parental support, ineffectual school leadership.

Latino critical theory. LatCrit theory addresses the layers of racialized subordination that compromise Chicana/o, Latina/o experiences.

Low achievement. The act of not achieving or performing; not obtaining by exertion; unsuccessful performance; not gaining accomplishment in educational settings.

Mexican Americans. Individuals who have been in the United States for generations and who see themselves as original settlers of the United States.

Residential segregation. To separate or isolate from others based on income disparities and choices individuals make about where to live.

Social change. The effort to transform socioeconomic depressed areas into revitalized communities where progress is made in schools, employment, and housing.

Working poor. Individuals who are employed but fall under or within the statistical distinction of being “poor” by the federal government.

Summary

The study is organized into five chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter One included the statement of the problem, purpose, research questions, significance of the study, definitions of terms, and summary. Chapter Two consists of the review of the literature and the theoretical framework adopted for the study. The methodology and research design are described in Chapter Three. The discussion of the findings and the analysis of the data are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five consists of implications, conclusions, and recommendations. The references and appendices conclude the study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Schools are not neutral institutions, but rather are extensions of social structures and inequities of society at large (Farkas, 2003). The literature revealed three key factors that affect Mexican American (MA) students' experiences in urban high schools. First, the historical implications of being a traditionally marginalized group in American society have played a central role in the educational progress of MA students. Second, the conditions of poverty (unemployment, low wages, and income distribution) that are prevalent in urban areas contribute to failed school systems that limit MA students' chances of upward socioeconomic mobility. Third, with a lack of strong historical tradition rooted in education and the problems associated with urban decay, the schools that many MA students attend fail to provide them with adequate forms of education.

The literature review further discusses the issues mentioned above and is divided by the following themes:

1. The history of oppression and denial of educational rights for MA students in California from 1945-2010;
2. The conditions of poverty in Mexican urban communities that affect school achievement; and
3. The factors (at-risk schools, lack of qualified teachers, and inappropriate teaching practices) that contribute to school failure amongst MA students.

The Historic Plight of MA Students in California, 1945-2010

Prior to the landmark California State Supreme Court case *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947), the educational conditions for Mexican students in California were marred by

years of discrimination and exclusion (Gonzalez, 1990). Similar to the Black experience in the South, Mexicans found themselves shut out of many areas (employment, housing, and business) of society, including schools (Contreras & Valverde, 1994).

According to Gonzalez (1990), with large populations of Mexicans congregating in urban areas such as San Francisco, San Jose, Fresno, and Los Angeles, there was a division of intellectual and human capital that was rooted in strong forms of prejudice from the dominant Anglo population. This separate but equal society led to MA students receiving substandard forms of education due to inadequate facilities and materials. Coupled with an unprepared and limited staff of teachers and administrators, there lied the conditions of despair for many MA students in California.

The separation of White students from MA students ended in 1947 when the California State Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Earl Warren, decided that MA students could attend the same schools as White students. This case arose as a result of a host of parents, led by Gonzalo and Felicita Mendez, who contested that their children were being denied admission on the basis of being Mexican at the Main Street School in the city of Westminster (Strum, 2010). Their letter of petition to the Westminster School Board grieved the following:

Dear Sir,

We the undersigned parents of whom about one-half are American born call to your attention to the fact of the segregation of American children of Mexican decent is being made at Westminster in that the American children of non-Mexican decent are made to attend Westminster Grammar School on W 17th Street at Westminster and the American children of Mexican extraction are made

to attend Hoover School on Olive Street and Maple Street. Children from one district are made to attend the school in the other district and we believe that this situation is not conducive to the best interests of the children nor the thorough Americanization of our children. It would appear that there is racial discrimination and we do not believe that there is any necessity for it and would respectfully request that this policy be overturned. Some of our children are soldiers in the war, all are American born and it does not appear fair nor just that our children should be segregated as a class. (Strum, 2010, p. 37)

The ruling allowed for thousands of MA students to gain access to the same forms of education that their White counterparts enjoyed. As a subsequent result of the ruling, the California State Legislature struck down all educational codes that required the segregation of all minority students. Thus, the Mendez case ended the era of de jure segregation in California.

From 1947 to 1960, the common patterns of segregation remained, but without any clear separation of Mexicans in schools (Valencia, 2002). Although Mexican schools no longer operated, many schools still existed with a predominantly Mexican enrollment, and administrators and teachers perceived these institutions as Mexican schools. A large number of school districts in California would employ methods where Mexican parents were given the choice of sending their children to the nearby school (the old Mexican school) or to the distant integrated school (the old Anglo school). As expected, many MA students continued going to the nearby school because of limited transportation. Thus, as de jure segregation terminated, a variation on the old theme of segregation and

discrimination appeared. Much of the old system remained intact where MA students were excluded from receiving an adequate education.

The rumblings of change began in 1960, when Mexican student groups (Chicano Youth Leadership Council, United Mexican American Students) began to form in opposition to the following conditions in schools: overcrowded classrooms, inadequate number of Mexican teachers and administrators, a curriculum that ignored the contribution of Mexicans in the United States, and the lack of programs to reduce the high dropout rates (Garcia, 1989).

These conditions led to the broader Chicano student movement, where militant and reformist agendas were created in order to stop the inequalities in education. Munoz (1989) stated that the student movement reached its apex when in 1968 10,000 high school students from five East Los Angeles high schools boycotted their classes. Sal Castro, a teacher at Lincoln High School and leader of the boycotts, explained,

The schools don't give a damn about Mexican kids. They give them garbage cans for schools and trash to learn. They endanger their lives with condemned buildings and their minds with hate, prejudice and lies. The way education stands now, it means to put race down and forget that you are a Mexican. Ya Basta! We have had enough. We will take no more! (Garcia, 2011, p. 68)

The activities of these students attracted national media attention when police attempts to disperse demonstrators resulted in violence. Thirteen students were arrested along with Castro. The arrests brought a firestorm of protests from Mexican civic and political leaders. The students were subsequently released and Castro was given his teaching position back (Rosales, 1995).

Sadly, by the fall of 1968, the demands made by the protesting students for educational change still had not fully materialized. The Anglo power structure was successful in stalling attempts to implement measures that would improve conditions for students. The student organizations that were so successful in leading the boycotts were not prepared to deal with financial and structural demands that needed to be met to keep the momentum of the movement going.

The Chicano student movement exemplified the politics of a decade that brought great change to social and political institutions in the United States. The ideas that emerged from the mass protests had a profound impact on students across the nation. MA youth, like other Americans, were able to participate in the struggles against racism and oppression. As a result of these times, many MA students began to question what they were being taught in school and how it related to being a marginalized group in American society.

With the end of the Chicano student movement taking place in the mid-1970s, a new era emerged that was marked by a bold new political conservatism that emphasized reliance upon traditional individualism and the marketplace. The movement deemphasized and questioned the effectiveness of state-sponsored reforms. The period witnessed a complete rollback of reforms that were enacted during the previous period (Munoz, 1989).

According to Garcia (1995), the cusp of this new era occurred in 1994, when the voters of California approved Proposition 187. If implemented, the proposition would have created a state-run system to verify the legal status of all persons seeking public education, health care, and other public benefits. The main area of focus of Proposition

187 was to prohibit all illegal aliens from the state's public education system from kindergarten to college and to require all public institutions to begin verifying the legal status of both students and parents.

This proposition represented the xenophobic attitudes toward students of Mexican descent. Camouflaged under the guise of immigration reform, the proponents of this law used undocumented immigrants to provide a scapegoat for the social problems that were confronting California. Fear of a non-White California through bogus data and illegitimate claims were the fuel that led to the victory of Proposition 187. While the initiative was eventually overturned, the political and social attitudes that accompanied it still remain vibrant today (Garcia, 1995).

The educational experience of MA students in California is a story woven through periods of exclusion, emergence, and marginalization. It is a collection of truths that expose the sad reality of generations of MA students not having access to adequate forms of education. The results of this history are broken urban communities with failed social institutions.

The Socioeconomic Factors of School Failure for MA Students

Jean Anyon (1997), in her paramount study of *Ghetto Schooling*, uncovered a new way of describing the problems that are associated with failing high schools in urban areas. Instead of focusing on the intrinsic factors (curriculum, administration, and teaching strategies) of urban schools, she examined how the conditions of poverty consistently block any significant effort to reform the schools in these areas. Anyon's efforts led to other similar studies (Valencia, 2001; Valenzuela, 1996) that confirmed her

assertions that to truly reform education there must be a concentrated effort to revitalize the areas where the students live.

Departing from the usual formulaic methods and approaches that seek to fix urban schools from within, the researcher in this study used the sociotransformative model laid out by Anyon (2005) that looks to solve the problems of urban schools by creating a broader social movement that will deal with the numerous issues uncovered in the study. This 10-step process has been a part of past social movements (the 19th Amendment/ Civil Rights) that have changed U.S. society for the better. Now, as the 21st century begins, communities and schools must be transformed by creating the following:

1. *Attribution of opportunity*: The first part of this process is a galvanizing moment that makes people want to join a cause. An example of this would be the 2006 school walkouts that were a response to an illegal immigration bill that would have led to a reduction in services and mass deportations.
2. *Appropriation of existing organizations*: During the Civil Rights struggle, the Southern Black Church was a key point for organization and communication. Similar to this structure in the Mexican community is that of the Catholic Church. Paramount in the farm workers' struggle and the recent illegal immigrant legislation was the role of the church.
3. *Outsiders and bicultural brokers*: The use of outside organizations (e.g., Black Communist Party during Civil Rights Movement) and people of different cultures to challenge hegemonic White school models brings credibility to these efforts due the fact that there would be a coalition of support.

4. *Creation of regional organizations:* Currently, there are numerous Latino organizations (League of United Latin American Citizens [LULAC], National Council of La Raza [NCLR], and Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities [HACU]), that could serve in this role to organize communities across states to participate in an assortment of activities to galvanize support and attention.
5. *Leadership development:* Through this effort to improve urban schools and the plight of urban communities, there will be formulation of leaders that become the voice of the movement. Similar to Cesar Chavez, Corky Gonzalez, and Delores Huerta, a natural tendency of leadership creation occurs once the movement spreads.
6. *Centrality of youth:* Crucial to any social movement is the impact of young people. Because the issue is about them and the communities they live in, there should be increased participation. The need for this movement to be centered on young people stems from the amount of participation time they will have because of either being in school or unemployed. Also important to this movement is the level of energy and passion that the youth implore.
7. *Community organizing:* The backbone of all social movements comes out of the grassroots work that community organizers do in organizing events, holding functions, starting voting drives, etc. Much like other minority communities, there are individuals of influence within Mexican neighborhoods all across the nation that would fill this area of importance. Usually these individuals are elders (former politicians, church members, and teachers) of the community who have gained respect.

8. *Participation in transgressive politics*: To keep this movement energized, there must be a continuous effort to keep people involved through different forms of participation activities (protests, voting drives, sit-ins). By frequently holding events, numbers will continue to rise, and organization in the community will strengthen.
9. *Cross-class and cross-generation alliances*: Fundamentally crucial to improving schools for MA students is creating cross-class and cross-generation coalitions that make a movement credible. Within this movement there must be unification amongst the old and the young and the rich and the poor. Without these alliances the movement would lose influence, because the older, more affluent powerbrokers would not give MA students the streamlines to power that is needed to become mainstream.
10. *Process of legitimization*: Through the tireless efforts explained above, the point of legitimization means that people across the nation would identify with the problems confronting Mexican students, both in the community and the classroom. Similar to the United Farm Workers movement, there would be local, state, and national attention that would legitimize the movement.

This ambitious grassroots idea is a way to shake the entrenched establishment by enacting sustainable change in urban schools. For far too long the needs of urban MA students have been neglected. Blame, agitation, and fear-based tactics have been used to subjugate an entire group of people from gaining access to quality forms of education. The emergence of a new social conscience was summed up by Munoz (1989) when he stated,

The movement to provide equitable forms of education is to a large degree a social/political movement that must not elicit from our people the negative responses that we have experienced so often in the past in relation to social movements, and often with good reason. . We must redefine ourselves to understand that educating our sons and daughters are the only means of liberation. The political sophistication of our cause must be raised so that they do not fall prey to the apologists and vendedos whose interests are not connected with the urgent needs of our children. (p. 94)

Changing the focus from the school to the community offers an honest introspection of the myriad problems associated with urban education. Inner-city schools that have been scapegoats in the national discussion of education can no longer serve as targets, due in large part to the macro socioeconomic factors of the inner-city as a whole. Therefore, the following section looks at the urban problem of poverty that affects the students of Rialto High School (RHS).

Mexican Urban Poverty

Most studies of poor neighborhoods and urban poverty have analyzed African Americans (Anderson, 1990; Jargowsky, 1994; Massey & Gross, 1993; Wilson, 1987). Mexicans are not only a growing component of the U.S. population, but also a growing component of the urban poor population as well. Similar to African Americans, Mexicans who live in poverty face issues related to ethnic and economic segregation (Massey & Denton, 1987). Yet there is scant information about how poverty is constructed for Mexicans in the United States. Some information about poor Mexican neighborhoods has surfaced from ethnography studies of selected areas (Moore &

Pinderhughes, 1993; Valdes, 1995), but a nationwide portrayal of Mexican poverty in the United States is lacking.

The literature points to three sections that are associated with conditions of poverty for Mexican students: (a) Mexican demographic structures, (b) human capital potential for Mexicans in urban communities, and (c) geographic and industrial settings where Mexicans are located. These three factors have played a strong role in continuing the cyclical problem of poverty in urban neighborhoods.

The first factor of poverty that impacts MAs in California involves the demographic structure of immigration. In 2001, 32% of all Mexicans in the United States were born outside the country, with 12% arriving in the United States between 1992 and 1997 (Enchautegui, 1997). The immigration effect on poverty involves the lack of human capital of Mexican immigrants as compared to natives. Upon entry, immigrants' earnings are below those of comparable natives. Over time, earning levels increase for immigrants; however, many of them stay mired in earning structures that keep them limited to low-wage work.

Another demographic variable of interest is the proportion of MA households headed by women. Populations of family households without a spouse present are especially vulnerable to poverty (Duncan & Rodgers, 1991; Eggebeen & Lichter, 1991; Kozol, 1992). Due to the low pay generated by many female heads of households and the small amount of workers in these households, households headed by women cannot generate enough income to raise families out of poverty. Work for the female is often impaired by other time-demanding roles, such as taking care of children.

The last factor in the demography of MA poverty is the young age structure. By virtue of their relatively recent arrival in the United States, the MA population is younger than the non-Mexican population. Also contributing to the young age structure of MAs are their high fertility rates (Bean & Tineda, 1997). According to Enchautegui (1995), age represents the lifecycle stage of productivity and earnings. Children and the elderly are for the most part not a part of the labor force. This phenomenon within urban Mexican communities leads to higher dependency rates, which in turn leads to higher poverty, because children are an immediate drain on resources, as the costs of investing in them cannot be recovered until far in the future.

The second factor of poverty for Mexicans in California involves Mexican human capital and employment conditions. The common association between human capital and socioeconomic attainment has proved elusive for Mexicans living in urban centers (Anyon, 2005; Moore & Pinderhughes, 1993; Wilson, 1987). Areas where Mexicans possess low levels of education are likely to have higher poverty rates compared to those places where education levels are much higher.

This is none the more evident than when one looks at how dropout rates of Mexican high school students affect human capital potential in urban areas. It is a consistent fact that Mexicans are more likely to be high school dropouts. The high proportion of high school dropouts among Mexican students explains a large part of the income differential between non-Mexicans and Mexicans. The low level of education of Mexicans was a larger liability in the 1990s, when increased returns to education placed workers with low levels of education further below those with high levels of education (Anyon, 2005). In California, the incomes of Mexicans lagged behind due to their

inability to take advantage of the jobs that were available for higher educated workers (Reimers, 1994).

Within the urban centers in which many Mexicans reside, there is a lack of well-educated individuals that uplift the social mobility of the area. Well-educated individuals can command resources that poorly educated individuals cannot. For example, well-educated parents tend to be more involved in the education of their children than poorly educated parents. This in turn leads to higher quality schools, which then translates into a greater number of people entering jobs that pay more. Well-educated individuals also attract businesses that can provide employment for neighborhood residents. The creation of jobs provides more individuals with opportunities for upward social mobility. The link between high levels of education and better forms of employment provides the foundation upon which poverty is eradicated (Enchautegui, 1997).

The third factor is the geographical and industrial settings where Mexicans are located, which have played a crucial role in contributing to the problem. This understanding of poverty treats the geographical and industrial settings as establishing the conditions under which people can avoid or fall into poverty. While groups may possess favorable demographic and human capital factors that may be negatively associated with poverty, they may continue to be vulnerable to impoverishment if they reside in areas where poverty is prevalent (Moore and Pinderhughes 1993). With such large numbers of Mexicans living in urban centers where poverty is entrenched, there becomes a continuous flow of people to an area that cannot provide certain socioeconomic resources for the area to flourish.

The three factors of poverty for Mexicans in California explained above provide a context of reasons why so many Mexican students struggle in school. With such high percentages of Mexican students coming from single-parent households, it creates a problem where the mother is trying to take care of the house financially, but falls short because her job does not pay enough to allow her to get ahead. This problem is compounded by the fact that this mother lacks the human capital that is needed for upward mobility. She has a substandard education that limits her opportunities for work. Finally, the poor urban city that she lives in encircles her in conditions where her children are confined to the very problems that she is trying to extract herself from. This sad cycle is repeated across generations, which leads to the failure of the social institutions (schools, law enforcement, and business) that are needed for improvement.

Mexican School Failure

The education of MAs in California has reached a crisis stage. Mexican students as a group have the lowest level of educational achievement of any group of students in California. This problem has been persistent at the local, county, and state levels for a number of years. This section looks at three common factors that contribute to this problem. These three characteristics consist of the following:

- At-risk school environments
- Lack of qualified teachers
- Inappropriate teaching practices

At-risk school environments. The term *at-risk school environment* suggests that it is the school rather than the individual student that should be considered at risk. By attending schools that are poorly maintained, in addition to having teachers who may not

be qualified, Mexican students are learning in a school environment that may be considered at risk.

Several studies have found that the environments that Mexican urban high school students are subjected to are alienating and consequently drive them out of school rather than keep them engaged (Kagan, 1990; Newman, 1995; Solorzano, 1995). Orfield (1996) maintained that a school environment either encourages or discourages student learning through a series of interactions. Waxman (1992b) identified some common characteristics that are found in at-risk urban high schools in California:

- Alienation of students and teachers
- Inferior standards and low quality of education
- Low expectations of students
- Classrooms that are unresponsive to students' needs
- High truancy and discipline problems
- Inadequate preparation of students for the future (p. 171)

These six characteristics highlight a multifaceted problem that plagues urban high schools in California. MA students who are subjected to these at-risk environments find themselves in learning environments where these factors cripple any form of substantive reform that would bring positive change.

Lack of qualified teachers. One of the most pressing problems in urban California school districts is the shortage of adequately qualified teachers and a lack of appropriately credentialed teachers (Losey 1995). Teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs), for example, are challenged with teaching traditional academic content to students who do not understand the language (Gersten & Rodriguez, 1997). Currently,

nearly 63% of all secondary teachers in urban California school districts have at least one ELL student in their class, but less than 20% of these teachers are certified ESL teachers.

In a profile of teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District where large percentages of urban MA students reside, 57% of all teachers responded that they needed more training or support in dealing with students of limited English fluency (Alexander & Ferris, 1999). They reported that the credentials (Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development [CLAD]) that they had been awarded by the state did nothing to prepare them for the difficulties of trying to communicate information with students who had language difficulties. Sadly, they admitted that many of the ELL students did poorly in their classes and as a result became discouraged with trying to learn in their other classes.

Inappropriate teaching methods. Another pressing problem related to the underachievement of MA students in urban California high schools is the teaching practices used by a majority of teachers in these schools. The most common instructional approach found in schools that serve MA students is the direct instructional model. In this approach, the teachers typically teach to the whole class at the same time and control every aspect of the classroom (Haberman, 1991; Waxman, 1992b). This teacher-directed model emphasizes lecture, drill and practice, remediation, and student seatwork that consists of assignments from textbooks and/or worksheets provided by the book. Some researchers have argued that these instructional practices constitute the “pedagogy of poverty” (Friere, 1970; Waxman, Huang, & Padron, 1995), because they focus on low-level skills that fail to prepare students for success beyond the years of schooling.

Several studies have examined classroom instruction for MA students and found that this pedagogy of poverty exists in many poor urban school districts that have high percentages of ELL students (Padron & Waxman, 1999). Waxman (2001) conducted a large-scale study of the classroom instruction of 90 teachers from 16 inner-city high schools serving predominantly MA students. The study found that students were typically involved in whole-class instruction, which allowed for little interaction with the teacher or other students. It was found that two thirds of the time the students did not have any verbal interaction with the teacher or other students. There were very few group activities. Students rarely selected their own instructional activities and were passive in the classroom when asked to take directives.

Another study conducted by Waxman et al. (1995) examined mathematics and science instruction in inner-city high schools in San Jose, California. This study found that the mathematics and science instructors participated in whole-class instruction 93% of the time. Students in mathematics classes worked independently 45% of the time, while students in science classes never worked collaboratively. Furthermore, teachers seldom posed open-minded questions for students in the observed classes, which resulted in classroom environments where students often looked disinterested and unengaged (Waxman et al., 1995).

The results of these and other studies illustrate that classroom instruction in urban schools with a high percentage of MA students fails to create learning environments where the students feel that they are part of what is being taught. This disconnect leads to classrooms where the students are held hostage by instructors who see no validity in the students being able to work together. The final result is a longstanding tradition in urban

high schools where the teachers dominate the systems of learning and the students are left in the cold.

Latino Critical Theory

Latino critical theory (LatCrit) provided the foundation and perspective for this research. LatCrit focuses on Latino/Latina issues often ignored by critical race theorists, such as language, immigration, ethnicity, and sexuality (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001). LatCrit is a theory that can address problems with racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. It is a theory that brings to attention the plight of Latinos in American society.

Perez (2009) explained how the creation of LatCrit offered a new way of understanding race in education beyond the Black/White paradigm. Valdes (1998) also noted LatCrit as an emerging theory that looks closely at the social and legal positioning of Latinos within the United States in order to overcome the obstacles many Latinos face within society. Furthermore, LatCrit seeks to examine practices, policy, and policymaking with an appropriate cultural and historical context, helping to better understand issues directly related to race/ethnicity and racism, with an ultimate goal of being able to recognize and change the structural inequalities that many Latino students face in urban schools.

The origins of LatCrit. The roots of LatCrit can be traced back to the end of World War II. The victorious completion of the war saw a small group of Chicano scholar-activists emerge to establish a new voice of equality for Chicanos in the United States. This group included George Sanchez (University of Texas), Ernesto Gallarza

(University of Notre Dame), Julian Samora (University of Notre Dame), and Quino Martinez (Arizona State University; Acuna, 1988).

George Sanchez could be considered the pioneer of seeking a new path toward equal rights for Chicanos. Prior to Sanchez's efforts, many of the efforts to organize Chicanos came from the grassroots level, either in the factories of the Midwest and East or the agricultural fields of the Southwest. His creation of the American Council of Spanish-Speaking People and his leadership in LULAC led to an emergence of using the civil rights process to defend the rights of Chicanos throughout the nation (Donato, 1997).

Ernesto Gallarza used the civil rights model implored by Sanchez to create the National Farm Workers Union (NFWU), a precursor to Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers (UFW). This organization focused its efforts on the impact of illegal immigration on wage structure. It was the first organization to highlight the problems with federal programs such as the Bracero Project and Operation Wetback. The NFWU demanded a repeal of these programs due to the wage-lowering effects they had in bringing undocumented workers to agricultural fields throughout the Southwest (Rosales, 1995).

Gallarza also helped to establish the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF). This organization has been extremely successful in protecting the legal rights of MAs and Mexican immigrants over the last 60 years. MALDEF has ensured the rights of Latino ancestry in the legal process in cases such as *White v. Register*, a voting-rights action that allowed millions of MAs access to the voting booth, and *Plyler v. Doe*, which set the precedent in allowing undocumented

Mexican children the right to attend public schools. Most recently, MALDEF was instrumental in helping to strike down California's Proposition 187 (Garcia, 1989).

Julian Samora and Quino Martinez were instrumental in creating community-based projects that focused on how specific policy initiatives could improve conditions in municipalities where large percentages of MAs resided. Also, Samora and Martinez were the first scholar-activists to promote MA studies programs on their campuses. Their efforts served as a guide to the Chicano studies programs that spread throughout college campuses in the Southwest in the latter part of the 20th century (Camarillo, 1984).

The efforts of these four individuals set the stage for the Chicano activists of the 1960s and 1970s. Inspired by the civil rights movement, the farm workers' movement in the West, the nationwide antiwar movement, and the land recovery projects in New Mexico, a new generation of scholar-activists emerged to express concerns with issues related to racial discrimination, poor education, and lack of equal opportunity in the workforce.

This new generation of scholar-activists, led by Corky Gonzalez, Sal Castro, and Rodolfo Acuna, constructed a new "Chicano" self-identity, which represented an effort to redesign the broader Chicano movement by a new set of standards. This new set of standards revolved around the idea of "Chicanismo," which activists employed to build solidarity throughout the MA community. These solidarity attempts led to the formation of powerful organizations such as La Raza Unidad, MECHA (Movimiento Chicano de Aztlan), and the Brown Berets. These organizations spurred watershed events such as the 1968 high school blowouts in Los Angeles (Meier & Rivera, 1995).

The enduring vestiges of the Chicano scholar-activists of the 20th century are the Chicano studies programs and departments that exist in universities throughout the Southwest. Through Chicana/o studies courses, many MA college students have become aware of the significance of past and present subordination of MAs in the United States. Showing the correlation between scholarship and activism has enabled successive generations of MA students to learn their history and become more active within their communities.

Latino legal scholars and LatCrit. The scholar-activism amongst Latinos on college campuses spread to law schools, where a small group of Chicano law professors began to demand that law schools do more to hire more Latina/o law professors. The three individuals who are credited with spurring these interests were Cruz Reynoso, Richard Delgado, and Michael Olivas.

Cruz Reynoso was an influential California State Supreme Court justice whose main cause was to assist migrant workers with legal and financial issues. He created the California Rural Legal Assistance, which sought to provide legal advice to migrant workers in rural areas whose rights were being violated. His career in legal activism continues to this day, as he serves as a law school professor at UCLA and is vice chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Montoya, 2006).

Richard Delgado began teaching law in 1974. His tenure at the University of Colorado, the University of Pittsburgh, and Seattle University provided him with the opportunity to be the pioneer in many fields. He is largely credited as the founder of critical race theory, critical White studies, and LatCrit. Critical to this study, Delgado was one of the first to state the importance of the narrative in scholarly publications.

Using stories to explain the workings of law allowed Delgado to bring attention to the different means of oppression that unrepresented minorities faced in American society (Valdes, 2000).

Another person who played a large role in the creation of LatCrit was Michael Olivas. Largely considered to be the “dean” of Latina/o professors, he was instrumental in pushing law schools to hire more Latinas/Latinos and helping existing Latina/o professors to obtain tenure and promotion. When Olivas began teaching in 1982, there were only 22 Latina/o law professors in the United States. Through his years of dedication, there are now 159 Latina/o professors in the nation’s law schools. The numerical increase of Latina/o law professors allowed for a nationwide dialogue to take place that led to the formation of LatCrit theory in the law (Del Castillo, 1990).

These three founding members spurred the rise of Latino legal scholars in the United States. Over the last 25 years, there has been a series of meetings and conferences that has tried to examine the legal issues that are of significance to the Latina/o community. According to Martinez and Johnson (2005), the foundation of LatCrit has been established by the following:

The development of LatCrit scholarship is attributable in no small part to the new generation of Latina/o legal scholars. This generation has focused on issues of particular concern to the Latina/o community, and has contributed a growing body of scholarship on Latino issues. The group added to the relatively small body of scholarship that previously existed on issues such as the impact of immigration laws on the Latino community, national origin discrimination against persons of Latin American ancestry, and language discrimination. (p. 70)

LatCrit and education. The population explosion of Latinos over the last 2 decades has led to an emergence of research (Carger, 1996; Darder, 1997; Soto, 1997) involving Latinos/Latinas in education. The growth of the Latino population in this nation's schools has led to more attention being paid to Latina/o educational issues. Much of the discourse involving Latinos in education usually revolves around a commonality of issues that include language, immigration status, dropout rates, and an achievement gap.

LatCrit seeks to challenge dominant ideologies in schools that are rooted in the conditioning of Latino students toward White-assimilation-based thought. LatCrit in education challenges the traditional claims that the educational system and its institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. The deconstruction of these claims offers new explanations as to the real reasons why Latino students are consistently mired in failure (Fernandez, 2002).

Over the last 10 years, LatCrit has emerged to offer new theoretical and methodological constructs that explain why for so long Mexican students have not performed well in school. According to Valdes (1998), LatCrit is made up of the following four functions: (a) the production of knowledge, (b) the advancement of transformation, (c) the expansion and connection of struggle, and (d) the cultivation of community and coalition.

The new creation of knowledge seeks to go beyond the common biological and cultural deficit models that pervade the discussion as to why Latinos have continuously performed poorly in school. Instead, this new creation of knowledge examines the rich historical, cultural, and educational contributions that Latinos have made in U.S. public

schools. The advancement of transformation speaks to the realization that Latinos in schools do not have to conform to the negative portrayals that are far too common in addressing the problems of Latinos in schools. The expansion and the connection of the struggle looks for all peoples (Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, etc.) united under the “Latino” banner to come together to explain the problems that they face within the Anglo-dominated school system. Lastly, the cultivation of community and coalition looks to how Latinos can set up academic, political, judicial, and neighborhood-based organizations that look to expand the calls for reform for Latino students (Trucios-Haynes, 2000).

The critical connection that LatCrit has in educational research is that the school structure represents a central location where social and racial power is constructed. Specifically, schools that educate large percentages of Latino/Latina students come under the scope of LatCrit, because as a legal/educational framework it seeks to challenge the systemic marginalization that is often found in these school settings (Bernal, 2002). LatCrit theorists advocate that while educational structures may oppress many of their Latino students, there is hope of empowerment through following progressive scholarship that focuses on overcoming racial barriers and economic inequality (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Valdes, 1995).

Summary

Through the literature, this study forwarded the historical, societal, and educational roadblocks that hamper urban MA students in high school. In the chapter that follows, the research design of the study is outlined.

Chapter Three

Method

This study examined what six Mexican American (MA) high school students had to say about their lives and experiences in school. The study focused on the influences that hindered or supported their individual academic performance. The descriptions of the students' experiences were emphasized in order to further the qualitative research paradigm and the narrative inquiry approach that were used. The theoretical perspective in the previous chapter refers to the effort to include the voices of students that are often in the periphery as it relates to the lived experiences of high school students. The next sections involve the research design, context of the study, data collection strategies, and reflections of the researcher.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach to research that seeks to reveal a wide range of human thoughts, emotions, and experiences (Creswell, 2003). Similar to other qualitative research approaches, narrative inquiry seeks to understand lived experiences and how individuals describe and perceive these experiences (Patton, 2003). The interactive and dynamic processes of telling and listening to the stories of others are the foundation upon which narrative inquiry is built.

According to Chase (2005), narratives are identified by the following situations:

- (a) a short topical story about a particular event and specific characters, such as an encounter with a friend, boss, or doctor;
- (b) an extended story about a significant aspect of one's life, such as schooling, work, marriage, divorce, childbirth, an illness, a trauma,

or participation in a war or social movement; or (c) a narrative of one's entire life from birth to present.

Crucial to the explanation and functionality of narrative inquiry are Chase's (2005) five analytical lenses. They are detailed by the following:

1. The first analytic lens deals with treating the narrative as a distinct form of discourse that brings meaning to the actions of the individual in an organized collection of stories. These stories express emotions, thoughts, and interpretations that highlight the uniqueness of each human action. Instead of reporting events over a given period of time, a narrative allows the narrator to explain his/her viewpoints and why his/her story is worth telling.
2. The second analytic lens allows for the narrator to use his/her "voice" in the context of the research. The use of voice allows the narrator to explain, inform, entertain, complain, and most importantly, defend or reject the status quo. The narrator's voice takes the research away from fact-based information or regurgitated data to stories that examine more in-depth forms of knowledge, such as the self, reality, and the experiences that were encountered by the narrators.
3. The third lens views stories as ways of explaining local settings that may have contributed to the self and reality construction of one's life. It is in this critical lens that the narrator becomes aware of his/her surroundings and their effect, either positive or negative, on the life that he/she has lived. This is where the narrator begins to find meaning in the efforts between the narrator and the researcher.
4. The fourth lens explains the relationship between narrator and listener as a socially situated interactive performance that is flexible, variable, and shaped in part with the

interaction with the listener. The back and forth between the narrator and the researcher allows for a new creation of knowledge to appear that is different from commonly produced narratives where the researcher uses the interview to produce material for the function of his/her self-realized facts. Indeed, the creation of narratives within the construct of narrative inquiry takes unpredictable turns and thus produces “rich” forms of information that are unique to the particular study that is being conducted.

5. In the fifth and final lens, the researcher develops interpretations from the narrative and finds ways to present and publish information about the content of the narratives that were studied. It is this crucial moment of the research where through the narratives the researcher begins to find his/her own voice as he/she discusses the results of what was uncovered.

Narrative inquiry is guided by the belief that people are social beings and telling their stories is primary to relating to others (McLeod, 2004). The personal stories of students’ lived realities help uncover complex concepts of society based on traditions that seek to consistently oppress students of color. Allowing disadvantaged MA students in urban schools to share their life stories paves the way for broader lenses of acceptance for the research community to discern.

The critical perspective of narrative inquiry is that the life experiences of students are often a direct consequence of the historical and sociopolitical realities that have hindered their progress across generations. According to McAdams (2006), an individual’s narrative reflects not only his/her personal story, but also the framework of cultural time and place where the life story is occurring.

Finally, the primary goals of narrative researchers are to make sense of the students' lives through historical/cultural discourses that they draw on and to be able to transform those discourses as they come to realize their disassociation from mainstream society and culture. In its purest form, narrative research seeks to provide counter stories and contradictions to the stories most commonly held in society (Bernal, 2002).

Context of the Study

Rialto High School (RHS) is a comprehensive high school consisting of 3,547 students. The racial/ethnic breakdown of RHS is 82% Latino, 14% African American, 4% Asian, and 2% other. Twenty-two percent of the population is English Language Learners. Fifty-one percent of the students come from low-income households. Currently, 72% of RHS students receive free and reduced lunch. The average student-to-teacher ratio at RHS is 33 to 1 (California Department of Education, 2009-2010).

The last recorded test scores from 2009-2010 show that RHS was 46 points below the state average. However, over the last 2 academic years, the school's test scores have begun to rise, due to several positive factors (leadership, increased funding, and demographic changes) that have enabled RHS to remove itself from state supervision (California Department of Education, 2009-2010).

What these statistics do not explain are the underlying problems of why RHS has been traditionally unsuccessful in providing consistent direction toward academic success. First and foremost, RHS lacks staff/administration consistency. In the 7 years the researcher has been an educator at RHS, there have been 3 new principals, 15 new assistant principals, a faculty turnover rate of 15%, and a consistent replacement of classified staff (janitors, secretaries, and academic coaches). With so much inconsistency

in leadership/staff positions, there has been limited direction in the areas of discipline, curriculum, administrative procedures, and most importantly, a general sense of the overall direction of the school.

The problems of RHS are a direct representation of the city that it represents. Rialto, California, is a city of 90,000 people that is largely made up of Latinos and African Americans. Currently, the unemployment percentage of those living in Rialto hovers above 17%. The poverty rate in Rialto is a staggering 25%, almost 10% higher than the state average. Income levels remain depressed at \$45,000 per year, and the crime index over the last decade is 100 points higher than the national average (Rialto California Community Profile, 2010).

These statistics highlight a common problem in urban centers where there are cyclical problems preventing upward mobility due in large part to failed institutions within the city. The problems of the community turn the students of RHS into prisoners of a failed city where the prospect of a better life is hard to attain.

Participants

The population selected for the study consisted of six MA 12th-grade students who have been enrolled at RHS for 3 consecutive years. The study occurred during the 2011 spring semester. The participants were chosen randomly and consisted of the following individuals (identified by pseudonyms):

Matt. Matt is a struggling RHS senior who has had to deal with the death of his mother. Since her passing in October, Matt has battled with the varied emotions that accompany a loved one's death. He is unsure if he wants to finish the school year. He is

credit deficient and doesn't want to put forth the effort to acquire enough credits to graduate. His only motivating factor is his mom's wish that he finish high school.

Lana. Lana has excelled academically in her time at RHS. Coming from Orange County in the eighth grade, she has found RHS to be unchallenging. Socially she has struggled to find friends who she can trust. She has also had to deal with the economic difficulties of her mom, who lost her job and has not been able to find other employment. She is excited about what lies in her future life beyond what she has encountered at RHS.

Jennifer. Jennifer has no place to live. Her mother has kicked her out of the house four times since the school year began. She has lived with friends and relatives. Without a consistent place to live, Jennifer's will to do well in school has been challenged. In the fall semester of 2010, Jennifer was absent 27 times. Her absences have led her to fall behind in school. She is contemplating leaving RHS and finishing her year at continuation school.

Andrew. Andrew is a bright, intelligent young man who has done well at RHS. His love for music and people has allowed him to develop a sense of happiness that inspires others. Despite being part of large, poor Mexican family, Andrew has seized his opportunity in school to make his life better. He is looking forward to graduating in May to begin his career and education following his dreams of being a professional musician.

Thalia. Thalia will be the first in her family to graduate high school and attend college. She is a star volleyball player who has scholarship offers from California State University, Fresno and California State University, Northridge. Thalia's achievements on the volleyball court and in school are in conflict with a home life that has been in

constant flux. Many nights there is nowhere for her to sleep. She compares her living situation to a hotel, except she knows everyone there.

Raylean. Raylean's 4 years at RHS have been marred by her decision to declare herself a proud lesbian. Shunned at home and put in the periphery at school, Raylean has carved out an existence at RHS that involves softball and working. She stays busy in order to not have to confront the reality that the people who are supposed to love her do not accept who she is.

Protection of Participants

The students who were asked to participate in the study were asked, along with their parents, to sign a written consent form. The consent form (see Appendix A) informed the students and their parents of the purpose and procedures of the study, asked for voluntary information, informed them that they may withdraw from the study at any time, and ensured them that all names and data would remain confidential.

Data Collection Methods

The method of selection began with 87 MA seniors who have completed 3 consecutive years at RHS. These students took part in a voluntary survey. There was no familiarity with the students, as they had no prior contact with any aspect of the study. The surveys were conducted in their government classes by a senior teacher who had no connection to the study. The teacher was provided with a script that stated the following:

A study is being conducted at Rialto High School that seeks to explore the experiences that you have had in the three years of attendance. Participation in the survey is voluntary.

The surveys that were administered were numbered. Once the surveys were completed, six were randomly picked as possible participants in the study. If the students did not want to be part of the study, the randomization process was conducted until six students agreed to participate. When six students agreed to be part of the study, they were asked to participate in a set of three interviews to further examine their experiences within a California urban high school.

After the completion of the surveys, the interview process took place. The individual interviews were conducted in the spring semester of 2011. The interviews were informal, conversational, and open-ended in order to develop a level of comfort amongst the participants. The students were considered producers of knowledge through their individual and shared experiences. While the goal of the interviews was to elicit specific information, there was a conversational aspect that allowed the students to share freely their thoughts and opinions.

According to Creswell (2003), the goal of in-depth interviewing is to “transform the relationship of the interviewer/interviewee into one of narrator and listener” (p. 157). This concept is different than the traditional model where interviewees have specific responses to a set of fixed questions. Using the approach of narrative inquiry brings to light the stories of narrators through their own voices. Creswell indicated that by using this method, there is a true effort to delineate meaning from people’s everyday lives.

The six students who participated in this study were interviewed three times for approximately 40-55 minutes. In the first interview, the researcher tried to establish a sense of trust so that the students would feel as though they were part of the process. The second interview consisted of a fixed set of questions (see Appendix B), which the

students documented and shared. The third interview provided opportunities to discuss the responses of the students and review past material for corrections.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis involves the arranging and organizing of information that was gathered, and data interpretation seeks to create new meanings and make sense of the shared information (Bodgen & Bilken, 2003). In the section above, an explanation was given as to how the data were collected. Through the interviews, the researcher combed the data by repeatedly looking over the information for the purpose of first analyzing “narrative threads, tensions, and themes” that developed over the course of the process (Clanadin & Connelly, 2000). From there, the data were interpreted in order to find the construction of meaning in the dialogue that was shared.

One of the primary focuses of narrative inquiry is to understand how people think, what they value, and how they have made sense of the events in their lives (Riley & Hawe, 2005). In order to analyze and interpret the information gathered, the researcher actively listened and relistened to find the students’ voice in each interview. Through these interviews, the researcher sought to understand how each student made sense and created meaning from their experiences at RHS (Chase, 2005).

To ensure students’ narratives were analyzed correctly, the students were consulted during and after each interview to check for understanding and to ask if the recorded narrative was correct. This process was done repeatedly in order to confirm the validity of each student’s voice (Creswell, 2003). Finally, once drafts of the students’ responses were completed, they were shared with the students to determine if the interpretation of their stories was appropriately portrayed.

Reflections and Limitations

As an educator at RHS, it was difficult for me to conduct research that was highly critical of the institution that hired me. For 7 years, I have developed professional and personal relationships with staff and administrators. At every turn, many of the people at RHS have been kind in responding to my requests and have done a good job of trying to do all they could to support my efforts as a teacher. By doing this research, I was turning my back on some of the individuals who have helped me.

The six individuals who participated in this study were, in my estimation, some of the best students I have come across as a teacher. It was difficult to conduct a study that tried to expose RHS in a critical manner using the experiences of students. While I hold the participants in high regard, there could be problems trying to get them to be consistent with taking part in interviews. As an instructor, this put me in a difficult position to ask them to complete work that was not required of them.

Summary

This chapter described how the procedures and materials were used to conduct the research needed for this study. The main focus of this chapter was to provide the methodological approach that was used to collect, analyze, and synthesize data. The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to understand the experiences of six MAs at a low-performing urban high school in California.

Chapter Four

Findings: Individual Student Narratives

The six students in this study identified themselves as Mexican American (MA). Four females and two males volunteered for the study. The following are the students' pseudonyms: Matt, Lana, Jennifer, Andrew, Thalia, and Raylean. The students were randomly selected from the survey created for this study. The six students have attended RHS for 3 years. Each of the six students reported experiencing considerable obstacles along with a general appreciation for what they encountered at RHS. The students demonstrated enthusiastic insight into their experiences. They displayed high levels of critical thought and were sincerely engaged with their responsibilities as subjects in this study.

From the beginning of this study, the six students and the researcher developed a relationship as coresearchers, and throughout their work together, as much as possible, the researcher needed help to understand their lives from their perspectives. The researcher emphasized the importance of honesty in everything that was discussed and written. He asked them specifically to look back over their 3 years at RHS and give responses that were reflective of the true nature of what they encountered. They not only spoke of their own lives and the lives of their friends, but also their observations of the overall student body and the teachers at RHS.

In conducting this study, the researcher had a semineutral position as the researcher and government/economics teacher at RHS. For 7 years, he has been an instructor and coach at RHS. With this period of service came his beliefs, passions, and biases. Having understood his predicament as the researcher, he tried his best to remove

these biases and his voice from the narratives of the students. In the time that the researcher spent with the students, he worked hard to not cast judgment on what they produced, but rather to validate what they were trying to express. Throughout the interviews, he constantly checked their responses by reading drafts to them of transcriptions of the previous meetings. The students were allowed to provide suggestions for changes along with any material that needed to be added or omitted.

The following sections begin with descriptions and background information of the six students (in italics). The students' narratives are divided by the following themes:

- Family/community support at RHS
- Experiences at RHS
- Challenges and successes at RHS
- Faculty support and limitations at RHS
- What can RHS do to better support students?

Matt

Matt is a 17-year-old MA male. Matt's appearance is dark and untidy. He often wears attire that could be labeled "gothic." He has light skin and dark black hair and eyes. Matt excels in art and loves creating his own music, which is a fusion between metal and house. Unfortunately, Matt is uninterested in school. He often finds himself sleeping in class. His attendance is poor, and since his freshman year he has had problems with truancy.

Matt attributes much of his poor performance in school to his mother's battle with cancer. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in the second semester of his sophomore year. Since then, he and his family rotated in caring for her. He would spend weeks

away from school due to his responsibilities at home. In October, Matt's mother passed away. Matt is highly motivated to graduate this year. Even though he is lacking the required credits needed to graduate, he is doing everything he can to fulfill his mother's dream.

Matt is unsure about what he wants to do after he graduates. He would like to go to college; however, since his mother's illness surfaced, there have been serious financial problems in the house. Currently, Matt is trying his best to focus on what needs be done on a daily basis at home. If an opportunity were to present itself for education beyond high school, he would take it into consideration.

Family/community support at RHS. Before my mom got sick she cared about how I did in school. She was always on me about what I was doing and if I was trying my best. My mother wasn't home a lot because she worked during the nights. When she wasn't home, I would hang out with my friends, totally ignoring my homework. When my report card would come in, I could tell how disappointed she was in me but would not get that angry with me, because I think she knew that there was nothing that she could do about it. I took advantage of knowing that she had to go to work. One of the things that I regret is that I didn't apply myself the way that I should have when she was alive. Now that she is gone I have no one that cares about what I do in school. It's weird; I know that she would want me to do better, but because I never really did anything when she was alive, I don't know how to.

As far as the community goes, I don't know what to say. I think overall when I look at the place that I live in I know that it is a dump. When I tell people that I am from Rialto, they ask me questions like, "How bad is the gang problem?" Or, "Are you afraid

to walk around at night?” I kind of just laugh when they ask me these things, but when I think about it I think it led me to believe that maybe I am not good enough. I mean, look around—there are buildings that are full of graffiti, trash all over neighborhoods, and cops on every corner. How are things like this supposed to support my education?

Experiences at RHS. My experiences here at RHS over the last 3 years have taught me things about this school and the people in it. I have noticed most students in this school waste time. Everyone is given 24 golden hours. It is a treasure people should use wisely instead of all the stupid drama with gangs and relationships. They don’t pay attention in school and make it even worse by disrespecting teachers and others. By their last year, they are worried to graduate and would do anything to make it. But once you have already used those 24 golden hours on worthless things, you cannot go back in time and take back everything you regret. It’s like life itself—you don’t appreciate what you have until life slaps you in the face and you start to see the reality in the world.

Challenges and successes at RHS. The times that I enjoyed RHS the most was when I was around friends that I could share the difficulties of my life with. Just sitting in the quad and laughing about what happened in class that day took me away from what is going on at home. The students are very understanding. I think that is because we all have difficulties at home, so when we hear someone else having problems it is easier to understand where they are coming from. Without friends this year I am not sure if I would have came back.

I haven’t really had any great successes in school, but one of the greatest successes I am going to have is getting my high school diploma this year. Along with my friends, I’m doing this because that’s the only thing my mom and dad asked of me. If I

don't get it, then I honestly don't know what I am going to do. I have to graduate this year! I am not doing summer school or any of that.

Faculty support and limitations at RHS. What stands out about my favorite teachers would be that some understood what I was going through. It made me upset when some of them just said to “suck it up.” Some would say, “Your mom”; that would really make me mad because my mom had just passed away. When I would hear that I would feel the demon that was caged inside of me wanting to come out. I would try my best to calm myself down to not do or say anything that would get me in trouble. The last thing that I want to do right now is add any other problems at home.

Some of the things that support students at this school are the teachers and counselors that actually take the time to talk with students about what is going on in their lives. Students go through a lot during high school, and some teachers help them go through it by talking to them and giving them advice on what they should do.

What limits the students are the relationships that they find themselves in. I have had a lot of friends who changed in a bad way when they were in relationships. They would ditch class, do stupid things in class, and even worse, some had kids that they didn't want from the person that they were with. Another problem that I saw was how influential “party crews” were at RHS. In my freshman and sophomore year, I noticed kids that were smart and motivated in middle school lose complete interest in school because they were caught up with what was happening with the needs of the crew.

What can RHS do to better support students? What RHS should do is get more school spirit. This school is just plain old dead. There is so much drama at this school because it's so boring people get angry. In class, when the students are bored it

leads them not to pay attention. When they are disciplined for not paying attention or disrupting the class, the way they react to the discipline is because they are bored. If it wasn't for the boredom there would be less drama and problems at RHS. I really don't know how I would get school spirit here because I am not that kind of person, but it would sure be nice if the students had pride.

Lana

Lana is an 18-year-old MA female. Her appearance is impeccable. She prides herself on how she looks. Numerous times in my contact with her she checked if her hair and makeup were still in the right place. She has light skin with big brown eyes that tell the world how she is doing that day. Lana enjoys the company of her boyfriend and the confines of her AVID program that, in her words, has "saved" her from RHS. She has always done well academically, as evident in her 3.4 GPA.

Behind Lana's efforts to create a perfect exterior are the uncertainties of what she is going to be doing after high school. She has been accepted to California State University, Long Beach, and California State University, San Bernardino. While she is happy that she has been accepted to these schools, she is extremely anxious about how she is going to pay for them. Her mother was laid off from her job of 13 years and they are moving from her childhood home to an apartment. This flux of living accommodations has caused her most recently to miss school. She finds herself torn between wanting to help her mom and wanting to help herself.

The problems that have confronted Lana this year have led her to find solace in the love of her boyfriend. She refers to him as an "escape" from the realities of her now-chaotic life. She is thinking of not attending the 4-year colleges that she has been

accepted to. Instead, she wants to pursue the relationship with her boyfriend and possibly get an apartment and attend a local community college.

Family/community support at RHS. My mom has been my rock in school. She has always been there for me, no matter what. There have been times where I would get lazy and didn't want to do my work. She would encourage me by constantly telling me about her hardships in Mexico. She would tell me about how small her house was and how there was hardly anything to eat. I know these stories by heart and they get old at times, but now that I have gone through some difficulties of my own I appreciate them. Without my mom, I would have been like my friends who don't really care about school. The discipline that I was a part of has paid off. My friends have nothing going right now, while I am waiting to hear back on being accepted to college. Even though things haven't gone so well for us lately, I owe so much to my mom.

I can't stand Rialto! I moved here from Orange County and there is not a day that goes by that I don't think about going back. When we first drove up to Rialto, I thought it was a joke. There was no way that I was going to live here. I could not believe the difference. Everything here looks so old and dirty. There are no nice restaurants or malls in Rialto. There is nowhere to go or anything to do. I think that is why so many students here do not do well in school. They do not have anything to do so they drink alcohol and smoke marijuana.

Sometimes, I look back and wonder how things would have been if my family would have stayed in Orange County. I think about all the opportunities that I may have missed out on. I look at that people that I consider my friends now and know that the people that I used to hang out with back in Orange County were better influences. When

I talk to them occasionally they tell me about their college visits and their SAT prep courses. Everything that they talk about is centered on their future. Here in Rialto, it is almost like nobody believes that they have a future. I guess if you lived here your whole life, like many of the students at RHS, that is what you start to believe because you have a whole community as proof.

Experiences at RHS. My experiences at RHS over the last 3 years have been hectic. My freshman year was a breeze academically. I had all A's on my report card. I think this was because we just moved from Orange County and I had no friends. The only thing that I focused on was school. My sophomore year was the best year at RHS because it was when I met the most people. I was introduced to the AVID program and it was there where I met a lot of the friends that I have today. During the second semester of my sophomore year, my grades began to slip a little bit due to medical problems and issues at home. These problems continued into my junior year. I would come to school crying because my mom and stepdad would always fight. My mother lost her job, and for the first time in my life, money began to be a problem. Also, during this time I chose a poor set of friends to hang out with. I began doing stupid things like drinking and skipping class. Now I am at the point where I have come to realize that no one has true friends.

Challenges and successes and RHS. I can honestly say I haven't enjoyed anything about this school, because I have looked forward to getting out of it. Being born and raised in Orange County, I was used to being around people who took pride in their community and schools. Around here, it is like nobody cares about anything. The city is

dirty and filled with graffiti on the walls. You are afraid to walk down the street alone. I do not want my future family to be around this, so the first chance I get, I want to leave.

Some of the greatest successes at this school are that I have stayed in AVID for all 3.5 years and that I have been able to pull through at home and at school when everything seemed to have come down all at once. I never thought that things would have turned out the way they did, but as I look back to what I have overcome, it has definitely made me a stronger person.

Faculty support and limitations at RHS. The teachers at RHS are the one bright spot in my time here. They have been supportive when I needed it the most and have given me the skills that I will need to be a success at the next level. Most of the teachers here provide afterschool tutoring and go out of their way to make sure that their students understand. There were two teachers that stood out during my time here at RHS. The first was my Spanish teacher my sophomore year. He is the one person who has built my self-confidence to where there is nothing that I don't think I can achieve academically. The second was my U.S. History teacher my junior year. He is someone that can be described as a trustworthy, caring, and charismatic person. From the first time I met him, I could tell that he was one of the few men in life that I could trust.

Something that goes on that limits students' performance is the peer pressure that goes on every day. Dealing with the issues of drugs, sex, and gangs gets old. I thought that by senior year these problems would no longer be an issue, but the opposite has occurred. Most of my friends are involved with marijuana and ecstasy. In my classes, there are girls who I never thought would be pregnant who are. I think that the reason why so many students are still involved with these problems is because they do not have

strong parents at home. They are able to do whatever they want without any fear of being in trouble.

Also, the way people present themselves is a major problem. They pretend to be someone, but in reality they are someone else who is completely different. Most of them have turned out to be really mean, who only get satisfaction out of humiliating others and making their lives miserable.

What can RHS do to better support students? I think that RHS should have more cultural diversified programs or activities in order to become more unified with each other. There are so many Mexican students here that at times it felt like the other Black, White, and Asian students were forced to fit in. I know that at other schools they have cultural fairs that show the positive differences in cultures. The faculty here could do a better job of educating their students about cultural diversity and how it could have a positive and negative impact on them, both academically and socially.

Jennifer

Jennifer is an 18-year-old MA female. She describes herself as quiet and shy. She has a tremendous love for soccer and has played for RHS over the last 3 years. She strongly believes that if it wasn't for soccer, she would no longer be in school. Much of her own problems at RHS can be attributed to her fluctuating emotional states. She describes it as a problem rooted in her family situation, where there is constant flux and chaos.

There is a real possibility that Jennifer will not graduate in May. She is currently 75 credits behind. She has almost exhausted all of her credit recovery options and is looking into enrolling in the district's continuation school. Jennifer is at a point where

she no longer cares if she graduates or not. She admits that at the beginning of the year she was determined to make up all the lost ground; however, with the problems that she has faced at home, she truly believes that there is no one in her life who cares if she graduates. She figures that if no one else cares, why should she?

Family/community support at RHS. I have no one supporting me right now. My mom has kicked me out of the house four times since this school year started. Even before she kicked me out, we have always had trouble. The relationship between my mother and I has never been the same since my mom and dad divorced in the seventh grade. Since their divorce, my mom has been in relationships with four other men. I never liked any of them. I think that is why my mom resents me so much.

When I first started school here at RHS, I did okay. I would show up to school and would finish all of my work. Over these last 4 years, all of that has went away. With my mom being gone so much with her new relationships, I had to fend for myself. Instead of trying hard with school, I got mixed up with the wrong people. I began to miss class and not care about the work I missed. Last year, I failed all six of my second semester classes. The school would call home over and over. One time my counselor even came over to my house to see what was going on. My mom would tell them that she was doing all that she could to make sure that I was going to school. Now I live with my aunt. I have no motivation to graduate. It would be nice to be there with all my friends that I grew up with, but I am just going to find some job and just see what happens.

I have lived in Rialto my whole life, and I think it is not that bad of a place. Everybody tries to bring Rialto down, but I like it here. I have good memories of

growing up here. I was raised around Rialto Park. That is where I learned to play soccer and had a couple of my birthday parties. Just because it doesn't have some of the things that other cities have, people think that we live in a bad place. I have family who I go and visit in East LA. I would take Rialto over places like that any day. Over there, the buildings are worn down and the gang issues are a lot more serious. Coming home from visiting my family, I consider myself lucky to live in Rialto. I just don't buy the excuse that because I live in Rialto that has made me struggle in school. I have struggled in school because I have made some bad choices. Any teenager living anywhere could do the same thing that I have done and not lived in Rialto.

Experiences at RHS. My experiences at RHS over the last 3 years were a little rough for me. I had a lot of distractions that kept getting in the way of my learning. My first 2 years I can say were not so rough because I paid more attention and worked hard in my studies. My junior year is when it started to get difficult for me, because I had so much going on at home. Since the beginning of my junior year, we have moved seven times. I have lived in two hotels, two apartments, and in three different houses with relatives and friends that I didn't know. I have been living with different friends and an uncle who has opened his arms to me.

Once we started moving, I felt careless about school and about life. I didn't want to listen to anybody. I recently learned from my teacher that no matter how bad my situation is, life is going to keep going, and the only person that is affecting is me. That really opened my eyes to change something about my life. I know that I can do so much better to get where I want to go in life.

Challenges and successes at RHS. What I enjoyed the most at RHS were the teachers. They were all so helpful and understanding. They are really patient when it comes to the students. I liked how RHS worked with the GEAR UP program to get more students into college. The program helped me a lot with my work, and they also sat down to listen to my problems and gave me great advice as to what I needed to overcome my difficulties.

Some of my greatest successes in school were being one of three students to get a high score on my CSTs [California Standardized Test] in math. It felt great to know that I did well and was surprised that I outscored some of the smarter kids in the class. Another success was me passing the CAHSEE [California High School Exit Examination]. I was worried due to my problems with English. I did not learn to speak English until I was in the seventh grade. I received a certificate for meeting all the reclassification criteria for the CELDT [California English Language Development Test]. I feel so proud of myself, because I never thought of myself as smart. Now I have something good to remember when I get older.

Faculty support and limitations at RHS. The thing that stands out about my teachers at RHS was that they had a great sense of humor and they were not afraid to tell you how it is. They work with you and make learning fun. The one teacher that I will remember most was my junior English teacher. I learned to respect her because she gave me a lot of advice about life. She also had a lot of patience with me, even though I didn't do too well in her class. There would be days at a time where I would not show up to class, but no matter what, she remained positive with me.

What limits RHS the most are the distractions that many of the students face. Since my freshman year, I have had many friends drop out of school due to gangs, boyfriends, or family problems. These distractions make it hard for the teachers to teach what is important, because so many of the kids don't want to learn what they are teaching. When my teachers used to become frustrated, I would feel bad for them. I knew that there was nothing that they could do to match the distractions that the students were dealing with.

What can RHS do to better support students? I think that RHS should try to come up with new programs that can help benefit students. It would be nice if they offered the services of GEAR UP to all grades instead of just seniors. I also believe that they should find a way to getting more students involved with the school. They can do this by making mandatory in the 4 years that a student is here they must join a club or sport. I really believe that this would help with school spirit. More students would feel more involved. They should also get more counselors to talk to the students when they have problems and advise them to make better choices in life. I think that if the school would try to do some of these things, more students would be more cooperative, both on and off campus.

Andrew

Andrew is a 17-year-old MA male who loves playing and listening to music. His 4 years at RHS have largely been spent learning and mastering the guitar and the piano. His musical talents have coincided with a strong desire to do well in school. At RHS he has maintained a 2.7 GPA and is a member of the choir and band. Andrew is a part of the MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, Science, and Achievement) and Key Clubs. He is

social and has many friends at school. Andrew plans to attend college and major in music. He is unsure if his focus on music in college will lead to lasting employment; however, he is sure that he doesn't have a sincere interest in anything else right now.

Andrew describes himself as one of those individuals who is able to fit in with any group on campus. He prides himself on being a contemplative person who cares about social issues and the well-being of those around him. Andrew reflected a deep concern about the problems (drugs, low expectations, peer pressure) that were present at RHS. While he felt that they had no impact on his desire to be a good student, he could see how these problems may affect students' ability to be successful.

One of the problems that Andrew has had to deal with most recently is moving in and out of different houses and apartments. In 2008, his father lost his job. Since then, he has had to take different odd jobs that have not been able to meet the financial demands of the family. The frequent moves have led Andrew to fall behind on different aspects of his schooling and music. Most recently, he had to drop his AP Calculus class, because his study time has been affected due to him not having a room to study in and restrictions on electricity. Still, given his problems, Andrew remains upbeat about his prospects in college.

Family/community support at RHS. I come from a family of 10. I have five brothers and three sisters. I am number six in the family. Due to my family being so large, I can't sit here and say that they were always there for me. My father has worked tirelessly to keep our family going. He works 7 days a week, and when he is home, he mostly stays in his room sleeping. While my dad is at work, my mom is in charge of

everything in the house. She tries her best to make sure that there are clean clothes, food on the table, and rules that are upheld. I don't know how they do it at times.

I have always known how busy my parents have been, so I never thought about if they supported me or not. School wasn't talked about much. There was an expectation that I was supposed to go to school and behave. Never could I do anything to embarrass the family. If I had a question with my homework, I would have to just figure it out. As I look back, I think I saw how hard my parents have had it, so I became motivated to not let them down. Their way of supporting me was to make sure that I had everything they possibly could give me that would make me successful.

Living in Rialto has made me a stronger person. I have lived here my entire life, and in that time I have gained an appreciation for this place. I have traveled around to different places, being involved with band and choir. I have seen all sorts of different high schools and communities in the area. When we would drive through these areas, sure I could tell the difference between a nice city and Rialto. Instead of being ashamed like many students are, I was proud to be from Rialto.

I happen to think that the experiences that I have been a part of have made me more understanding and appreciative. I know how difficult some of the students have it at RHS. We don't talk about these struggles much, but for some students like me, it motivates me to try even harder. I know if I didn't live in Rialto, I would not have this burning desire to make my family and community proud.

Experiences at RHS. RHS is where my best and my worst moments have occurred. When I look back at my best moments, it would have to be my band and choir performances. As a freshman, I was a shy kid who was afraid to talk to anyone at school.

Being a part of the band allowed me to meet new people. Taking part in the band performances gave me a lot of confidence, because we would play in front of large audiences. The choir performances also stand out in my mind. These performances were always in front of audiences where my parents and friends would attend. Seeing them applaud for me made me feel proud. My worst moments would have to be my time in the attendance office. Because I moved so much over my junior-senior year, I have spent a lot of time in trying to explain why I wasn't able to come to school. My absences even led me to get suspended and be put on an attendance contract.

Challenges and successes at RHS. What I enjoyed the most about Rialto High are the people. In my 4 years at RHS, I have come into contact with pretty much every kind of student that you could think of. Having contact with all these different students I believe has made me a better person. Learning from teachers that show you how to deal with the tough things in life was also enjoying for me. Listening to their personal stories would give me motivation to deal with my own problems. Lastly, seeing the work that our administrators put in to make this school a better place. These people work their fingers to the bone for this school.

My greatest successes at RHS have probably been what I have accomplished in my senior year. As a MESA student, I am proud to say we won second place in the boat-making competition. We went up against 40 other schools from the area. Our task was to create a sturdy boat only using environment-friendly materials. Being the lead engineer on the team led me to think that my problem-solving skills are really high because of our success. Another success would be my membership in the Key Club. In my 2 years as member, I have completed over 100 hours of community service.

Faculty support and limitations at RHS. The support that I have had from teachers has been okay. The teachers that stand out in my mind were those who were intelligent, witty, and fun to be around. Every day in these teachers' classes I was motivated to work and learn. Unlike many other students at RHS, I look forward to going to class each day. These teachers got me interested in physics, math, and science to the point where that is what I want to pursue in college. They were able to get me interested in things I never thought existed.

The classes that I found frustrating were those where there was not a lot of learning going on. It is my opinion that teachers should always want to deal with the needs of the students. Some of them do this, while others it seems are here just because of what they know or what they can teach you. I agree that learning what is being taught is important, but I also think that teachers should help students try to be better people. Because of the behavior problems at RHS, many of the teachers feel the need to have complete control over the classroom. They talk down to the students, making the students discouraged to learn. Teachers need to be aware that not all students have an environment for learning at home. Many students do not have a place to go home to study, which makes school really difficult. They may have a home, but they have so much going on. Arguments, loud music, siblings having to take care of siblings, and stuff like this makes it hard for students to come to school ready to learn.

The main limitation at RHS is the lack of school spirit. I never walked through the halls of this school and heard, "Rialto is the best," in the 3 years of attendance. I would think that people would naturally have respect for their school. My friends at other schools tell me about their cool pep rallies and all the activities that they have

available to them. I value my free education and think these students should have some dignity and respect for the school that is offering them that free education. I am proud to be a Knight!

What can RHS do to better support students? RHS needs to do a better job of communicating what is required to go to college. Neither my parents nor siblings went to college. Nobody ever sat me down to tell me what it took to go to college. Because of this, my freshman and sophomore year I kind of cruised through my classes. When I should have been getting A's, I was getting B's and C's. When it came time to apply to college, I learned that many of my choices were limited because of my grade point average. Sadly, I had to learn this information from my friends instead of hearing it from our counselors. In my time here at RHS, I may have met with my counselor five to seven times. When I did meet with them, it usually involved schedule requests or changes. If someone, not even necessarily a counselor, would have sat me down and told me what it would have took to get into college, I would be so much better off. Now, I am somewhat forced to go to the local junior college and am not too thrilled about going because I think that I deserve so much more.

Thalia

Thalia is an 18-year-old soft-spoken MA female. She is tall, athletic, and intelligent. She enjoys volleyball and plays for RHS. She also is part of the athletic training program at RHS. Thalia describes herself as one of those people who doesn't get caught up in the "drama" of high school. She prides herself on trying to make decisions that will benefit her future. She refers to her shyness as her own personal

handicap that has crippled her abilities to be considered one of the smart students at RHS.

Thalia has light skin and eyes. Quite often she is mistaken for a White girl. Her appearance has led her to defend her MA heritage to the point where she resents the pigmentation of her skin. Thalia lives with her mother and six other siblings. She lives in a three-bedroom house that she describes as “extremely crowded.” She shares a bedroom with her brother and his girlfriend. She admits that at times there is nowhere to move in the house and it forces her to spend long hours at school, because she doesn’t want to deal with all the issues of her house. In the house, marijuana use is prevalent. She said that everyone in the house, including her mother, smokes weed (marijuana). Thalia isn’t proud of this fact, and wants desperately to find a new place to live as soon as she graduates.

Despite her hardships, Thalia makes A’s and B’s in school. Her hard work in school and volleyball have led to the possibility that she will receive a scholarship to play either at California State University, Fresno, or California State University, Northridge. She reported that she is generally confident about her academic skills and her ability to make people better around her. She thinks that her negative experiences at home and at RHS will only make her a stronger person.

Family/community support at RHS. As long as I can remember, my family has never been there for me. My mother has two sets of kids from three different fathers. I come from the last set of kids. I have never known who my dad is. There are a few pictures of him with me when I was a baby. I used to wonder about him, but since I have not heard from him in such a long time, I don’t really think about him anymore. I have

two sisters and three brothers. The only one that I am close to is the sister that is closest in age to me. My entire family still lives in the same house together. There are people on the floor. There are people in the garage. For a while there, there were people even in the backyard. The house is complete chaos.

I am the only one in the family who has anything going. Everybody in my family smokes weed and drinks alcohol. I can be at my house in the morning or at night and smell the weed being smoked. I hear my siblings having sex. Sometimes when they bring their friends around it is even worse. In a lot of ways it's like I live at a hotel, except I know all the people. There are no rules. You do what you want. If I want to go to school, I can. If I want to stay home, I can do that too. I used to resent my mom for not being more involved in what I was doing. Now that I am a senior, I think not having anyone helping me has made me a stronger person. I gave up a long time ago thinking that people were going to be there for me. I know that the only person that is going to be there for me is me, so I have to do all that I can to get myself in a position to where I am doing the things that will get me ahead in life.

I am done with Rialto. Once I accept my scholarship, I am gone and will never come back. My whole life I have seen some pretty bad stuff happen in this city. I have been at parties that have been shot up. I see all the drugs that are used. The majority of my friends have kids or are in a relationship with guys that have nothing going on. When I look back, I don't know how I did not get caught up in all of this. If people really knew what was going on in the halls of RHS, they wouldn't believe it. The same things that are going on in the city are the same things that are going on in the school. At RHS, I have seen students dealing and doing drugs. I know and have seen the so-called "adults" at

RHS coming on to some of the female students. In the bathrooms, I have seen girls completing sexual acts on boys. All of this is the nightmare that I am leaving. The bad thing is that I know none of this stuff will ever change.

Experiences at RHS. I have grown up so much in my 3 years at RHS. When I first came here, I was a shy, timid person who was afraid of everything. Even though I am still shy, I am a lot more confident in myself to get things done. The experience of being a student-athlete is what I remember most about my time here. If I was not a part of the volleyball team, I think I would have been one of those students that nobody would ever notice. Because I was a part of the team here at RHS, people recognize who I am. The people that I met in volleyball have led me to come out of the shell that I was buried in. They made me realize that I was important and that if I worked hard enough I could accomplish my goals.

My time as a student trainer is also an experience that I will remember. Starting as a freshman, I didn't know what to expect. Being around those big senior football players and those tall basketball girls was very intimidating. Over time, I got to know some of those seniors, and some of them even gave me advice of how to take advantage of my 4 years of high school. The athletic training room was like a second home to me. I would spend long hours there. It was nice to have a place like this at school, because I was able to do my homework there. Even more important, it gave me a place to go other than my house. If I would have been at home, I would have become a pothead like the rest of my family.

Challenges and successes at RHS. The things that I enjoyed the most would have to be my time in volleyball. For 3 years, my entire time at RHS was devoted to

making me a better volleyball player. I would spend countless hours in the gym working on my quickness, strength, and my serves. Several times I was left in charge of shutting off all the lights and closing all the doors. I would do this because I am addicted to the game. Nothing makes me as happy as seeing all of my hard work pay off in games. In 3 years, I have changed from a tall, uncoordinated little girl into a Division 1 college volleyball player.

The biggest success that I had at Rialto took place in the classroom. Coming from junior high, I had no focus as a student. I didn't know or understand the importance of having good grades. Nobody in my family ever talked to me about grades, so I kind of would always just show up and do what was necessary to get by. This all changed my freshman year, when my volleyball coach explained to us the value of grades and their impact on what life would look like after high school.

The example she gave was based on two of her former volleyball players. The first player was a star. She told us that she was the best player that she ever had in the volleyball program. The problem with this player is that she did not care about her grades, and when it was time to be recruited, no one wanted her because of her performance in school. She informed us that this player now works as a cashier at Stater Bros in Fontana and regrets what she did. The second player was slightly above average. She worked real hard but didn't have near the talent as the first player. In the classroom, she always maintained a GPA above 3.0. When it was time to be recruited, she was able to go to La Verne University. She starred there in volleyball and now is a successful architect in Claremont.

When she was done with this example, I was floored. For the first time, school made sense to me. In all my classes, I began to work harder and would see the results every semester on my report card. Every year my grades would improve, and now, because of my hard work, I have a GPA slightly over a 3.0. I am proud of my efforts because I have done it all alone.

Faculty support and limitations at RHS. I was bored in class most of the time. The teachers would make things so easy that I was hardly ever challenged. I could never understand why so many of my other classmates would struggle so much. Honestly, I can say that I never really had to study or have any serious problems with any of my homework. The teachers at RHS are way too nice to the students. They would allow them to turn in work late, retake tests, and look the other way when a student was breaking a rule. I think a lot of the teachers are afraid of the students. They talk a tough game, but when it was time to discipline a student, they would only give them warnings. At times, I felt bad for them, because some of them would be trying to teach and there was not one student listening to what they had to say. Sometimes I think that I may not be prepared for college because I haven't really been pushed in high school. I guess only time will tell on that one.

The main limitations at RHS are all the meaningless rules that the students have to obey. I have been to the principal's office a lot due to my iPod. All my life I have listened to music. Music takes me away from the chaos and sadness of my home. I think that is how I became so shy. In class, I would use the music in my iPod to take my mind off the boring busy work that I always had to do. I tried every possible trick, but I would get caught, and the security guards would take it away. Other rules dealing with dress

code, mandatory IDs, and cell phones all seem to be way too much. Time after time, I would see students getting in trouble for things as stupid as wearing shoes that didn't have backs to them. So many of my friends would be wearing dresses or skirts that were okay for school but would have to change out of them because of stupid dress code. The one rule that was violated the most was cell phones. I don't know how they expect us not to use them if they allow us to have them in the first place. There are a lot of arguments between students and teachers over taking away their cell phones. All of it seems as a way to control us. How are we supposed to develop as adults someday if we are being treated like little kids?

What can RHS do to better support students? RHS needs to do more to get more students to graduate on time. Many of my friends are currently doing all that they can to graduate this May. When I ask them if they knew about their credit deficiencies, many of them tell me that they were not informed until the beginning of this year. At first when they told me this I thought that my friends were stupid. I mean, who doesn't know how many credits it takes to graduate? Then it hit me that my friends have similar home situations as mine and they never had a volleyball coach to explain to them what was needed to do well in high school. I have one friend who has a zero and seventh period on top of going to night school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. When she is at school, she has to sit in classes that take the whole semester for her to get credit for the class. I think with all the kids who do not have the credits to graduate, they should put them in classes like I took in summer school, where they are 3 weeks long and 6 hours a day. It is so sad [that] all the kids that I went to school with during my time here at RHS won't be joining me on May 24th [to graduate].

Raylean

Raylean is a 17-year-old MA female at RHS. Raylean's physical appearance is a bit untidy, and she often wears dark-colored pants with a dark-colored shirt. She informed me that she wears her clothes this way because she is conscious of her weight. She has light skin and dark hair and eyes. An intelligent and articulate young woman, she describes herself as a quiet thinker who is constantly battling with her appearance and identity. Raylean is a proud lesbian who has to deal with her family not accepting her for who she is.

Raylean is a self-admitted "average" student. She attributes this to her participation in sports and a poor selection of friends during her time at RHS. In addition to participating in sports, Raylean works 25 hours a week. The demand on her time has caused her to develop serious issues with insomnia and difficulties waking up in the morning.

Raylean plans on going to college in Northern California. She stated that she would like to study sports medicine, physical education, or English. She is unsure at this time, because she is torn between continuing her involvement in sports and competition and following her newfound love of reading and writing contemporary poetry.

Family/community support at RHS. My family has always supported me academically and in athletics for as long as I can remember, from teaching me my long division in elementary school to helping me choose a college for after high school. My family has always been there, but for some of my personal life, they have let me down. While I was discovering my sexuality, my family didn't support me at all. In fact, when I had told them I'm homosexual, they had threatened to take me out of public school and

exclude me from all my “worldly” friends. My family and I are Christian believers. I see it as God made me this way and they see it as the Devil trying to rip me off from having a blissful life. So for the past 4 years of high school, I have been playing the role of a “good” student/ jock and hiding my true self from my family. I do fear that one day I’ll be forced to choose between my family and the girl I may love in the future. That decision wouldn’t probably be easy for anyone to make. The lifestyle I’ll be living is unacceptable to my family and it does hurt me, because I know I’ll never be accepted and would always be looked down upon by my family.

In my opinion, I think Rialto supports our efforts very well. I admit when I first moved to Rialto, it seemed like not many opportunities will be made here, but over the years, our city has progressed. I have noticed that they have built new parks and community centers for us to go to. The city library is better than the library that we have at school. When I hear other students complain about Rialto, I think that they are just going with what everybody else is saying. I know our city has a bad reputation, but honestly, Rialto has everything that other cities have in it. There are bad parts and good parts. We have every type of store you need, and there are a lot of things to do. I haven’t ever thought that Rialto has ever gotten in the way of the things that I wanted to accomplish.

Experiences at RHS. In all honesty, I think my experience at RHS was pretty dull, and I admit that was my fault. I did want to participate in more clubs and sports. I think the big reason why I didn’t participate more was that I was so conscious of my sexuality. I saw the looks some of the other students would give me when I would be holding hands with my girlfriend. There would be times where I thought that there was

something wrong with me. What hurt the most was the fact that some of the adults on campus were not supportive of who I was. I had a teacher my sophomore year who lectured me for a long time, telling me how hard life was going to be as a lesbian. I don't think he understood that at home I have had to listen to the same speech. As my senior year comes to an end, there is a little bit more acceptance from my family and others at RHS. I am more comfortable with myself, but I still have so many bad memories from what I experienced.

Challenges and successes at RHS. Some of my enjoyments and successes I would have to say are the times I got an A on tests, making the softball team all 4 years of high school, winning second place in an art contest, and writing articles for the school newspaper. My softball years are both my enjoyments and successes. Each year, I had to try out and hope that it would be a better season. My abilities had progressed over the years, and I went from JV material to varsity material in the 4 years of playing. My best success in playing softball is my junior year playing. I had ended that season with two homeruns and an award of Best Offensive Player of the Year. That was a real honor to me, and I would never forget it. I had also won second place in the school's art contest that year too. My printmaking teacher submitted a painting of a tiger I had done, and I wasn't aware that it was submitted nor that I had won a prize till he called me to his room and told me the news. I hope that my last year at RHS would be just as successful as my other years attending.

Faculty support and limitations at RHS. Well, from my personal experiences, I didn't have any problems with the faculty at RHS. However, I did have some trouble with certain teachers, who were disorganized and would lose my work. It would piss me

off, because I'd work so hard on an assignment and my teacher would lose the work. My grades would drop because of their mistake, and that is completely unfair. That'd piss off anyone, and I'm sure that I'm not the only one who's experienced this. I also think that some faculty members aren't professional with their work. [In] my years here, I have seen flirting and disorganization. My mother went to talk to my brother's counselor and she had said that some faculty were rude and didn't seem to be doing their jobs. She was waiting to talk to the counselor for a half hour and the secretary didn't tell the counselor that my mom was there to see her. My mother had to find out who my brother's counselor was herself. So in my opinion, professionalism is lacking with some faculty members.

The biggest limitation at RHS is the counseling department. In my 3.5 years here, I have always had problems getting the classes that I wanted. I have spent numerous hours during my lunch period and after school waiting for counselors. I would make appointments, and about half the time they would not show up. I always thought that a counselor was supposed to be there to listen to the problems of the students. When I would go in there at times when I was having a bad day, they would tell me that I would have to make an appointment. I didn't want to make an appointment; I wanted to talk to someone. I hope they can bring in new counselors so that future students don't have to go through the same problems I did.

What can RHS do to better support students? Our school needs to do a better job of helping students who are gay/bisexual. Many of my friends are homosexuals who have expressed to me their fears of being a different student on campus. Some of them have been mentally and physically violated. There is nowhere for us to go. When some

of us wanted to start our own group, ASB [Associated Student Body] office did everything they could to make it difficult for us. We had to get over 300 signatures and had to come up with a detailed plan as to what our group was going to be about. When I asked people from other groups if they had to do the same thing, they told me that they didn't have to. Now we have a teacher who has taken us under his wing. He lets us meet in his room. In his class, we are free to be who we are. It has been a place where I have grown as a person. I know other kids on campus struggle with their sexuality. It would be nice if our school did a better job in getting them to feel better about it.

Chapter Five

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter includes the conclusions, implications, and recommendations drawn from this narrative inquiry research about the shared experiences of six MA students at Rialto High School (RHS). This study examined three areas (history/politics of MA students in California, the economy of Latino urban centers, and the educational neglect in urban public high schools) of inequality that have heavily impacted the experience of the MA urban student in California. This study proved that when given opportunities, MA students are capable of demonstrating wisdom, insight, and critical analyses of their lives. In this narrative inquiry, six students of Mexican descent provided rich sources of information and became strongly engaged in pointed conversations about the common problems that hinder their progress in school. It is clear from their words that there is a great deal to learn.

Conclusions

Applying the lens of Latino critical theory (LatCrit) and drawing upon the prior research reflected in the literature review, this study supports the premises that (a) urban high schools in California that high percentages of MA students attend are not neutral institutions where the playing field is equal; (b) schools are sites where students feel conflicted between the stress and problems that they encounter and maintaining an acceptance of the school based on positive experiences from faculty members and other support staff; (c) students' experiences are shaped and influenced by the inequities based on race, power, economy, ability, and other differences in society; and (d) voices of

students who are unrepresented in society provide new perspectives of the what is needed in order to influence change in California urban high schools.

Schools as unequal playing fields. The crucial finding of this study is that schools in urban areas are not neutral institutions and are heavily influenced by the negative societal conditions, which, in turn, influences how students view the school that they attend. In this study, it was evident from the students' descriptions that tension and negativity that were present in school mirrored what was going on in their homes as well as what they perceived to be occurring in the community. The factors that were most commonly mentioned that described this tension and negativity involved poverty, low expectations, and patterns of inconsistency in established rules and norms.

From their comments, it was evident that the students felt a general sense of abandonment in that they were left to their devices to deal with the problems that they faced, both at home and at school. The experiences most commonly shared were parents having trouble finding or sustaining employment that created enough financial capital for the family to stay afloat, friends participating in gangs or party crews, and a constant flux of problems related to social interactions that were perceived as negative or significantly impairing the students' progress at RHS.

Confliction of experiences in schools. Another major theme of the research was students describing school as a place where they felt socially uncomfortable, while at the same time embracing what they encountered. They were unified in their feelings of distrust of the people that they attended school with. Years of failed relationships amongst friends and significant others confirmed the idea that RHS was not a place to be

around “quality” people. On the other hand, they had a strong respect for the faculty, along with others who supported their efforts to finish high school.

Overall, the students depicted high school as a place where unfulfilled expectations collide with unmet obligations. For the students who expressed that they had failed to live up to their potential, there was a consistent pattern of problems at home that involved financial problems, divorce, dysfunction, drugs, gangs, and frequent changes of address. They knew that they could have accomplished more; however, their problems at home compromised what they were able to accomplish at RHS.

Throughout the students’ narratives, there was a general sense that the community and the school failed to meet their obligations to better the lives of the students. There was a general consensus that RHS was void of any real spirit and tradition that made the students feel proud to attend. Also woven in the narratives, there was a significant lack of leadership in the area of getting students prepared to succeed once they left RHS. Unmotivated counselors and administrators were the culprits to blame in this area.

The majority of the students viewed their community as a negative factor in their education. They described problems stemming from drug/alcohol abuse, gang participation, party crews, graffiti, and overall lack of nothing to do in the city. Their responses uncovered a profound realization that the place where they lived was a consistent source of embarrassment. They were emphatic that one of their first priorities after high school was to move away from Rialto and begin a new life.

The students viewed RHS as a school where rules, confinement, and a general sense of apathy among the adults pervaded the campus. They thought that these three problems seemed more important to educators than what students were actually feeling,

learning, thinking, and experiencing. They expressed that the policies and rules of the school served as a deterrent to learning. They felt that too much time was spent on disciplining students for matters such as dress code, cell phones, and other electronic devices. They described disconnections between the lives of students and teachers, and the lack of sensitivity and empathy to students' lives outside the classroom. Additionally, there appeared to be a significant divide in communication between the students and the adults about their lives inside the school gates versus their lives outside the school gates.

The students held the faculty at RHS in high regard. The students naturally liked teachers who were nice, respectful, and flexible, yet strict when it was necessary in order to have a classroom that embodied high expectations; teachers who didn't just sit at their desks, uninterested in what they were teaching, but who were energetic and engaged with the students on a daily basis; teachers who were willing to understand the difficulties that students were experiencing in their lives; teachers who understood that each student is different and did things to help students to learn the material without losing their patience. The majority of the students in this study saw the faculty of RHS as the school's main strength. Through the efforts of the teachers at RHS, the students knew that despite what they encountered in and out of school, school was what they needed, and they knew that they could better their lives by attending college. Even though the students' lives are filled with hostility and harshness, it was the teachers who motivated them through care and high expectations.

Students' experiences shaped by economic inequities and power differentials.

Another premise of this study is that students' experiences in school are tied to the economic inequities and power differentials according to race, ability, language, sexual

orientation, other differences related to society (Nieto, 2004). The perceived discrimination expressed by the students was at times overt and other times quite subtle. For example, despite all of the students demonstrating that they are articulate, capable, and college bound, of the six students interviewed, only two (Andrew and Lana) had ever been placed in honors or Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and only one (Lana) out of those two remained in those courses. Andrew did not know why he was taken out of these courses, but thought that it may have had to do with his subpar writing skills. He didn't learn English until the third grade, and because of this his writing fell behind. He thought that a specific research paper in AP U.S. History exposed his deficiencies, causing his complete removal from the AP program. Thalia makes all A and B grades in school. She demonstrates that she is capable of performing at a higher level. However, she contended that one of the reasons why she was never chosen for AP classes was that she displayed what she called "ghetto" behavior as a freshman and sophomore. Due to her outward reflection of the life that she was exposed to at home, the teachers in the honors program saw her as "unfit."

Additionally, the students recognized the inequities in society according to class. They verbalized the differences between Rialto and other communities. For example, Andrew noted that when he participated in band and choir competitions at other schools located in more affluent areas, he could see the difference between the two areas. He noticed cleaner streets, nicer parks, no liquor stores, and schools that were in pristine condition. Lana mentioned the difference between Rialto and Orange County. Having lived in Orange County up to the eighth grade, Lana was exposed to large, safe shopping areas, a variety of restaurants, and neighborhoods that were safe to walk in at night.

These differences in class etched in the minds of the students that they were from a community that was substandard. They understand that their current place in society is detached from the upper positions of society that they yearn to join someday.

Understanding the voices of MA California urban public school students.

The connection between LatCrit and what is being forwarded by this research offers a glimpse of those most often overlooked in society. Voices of the underrepresented MA urban youth provide multiple examples of what is confronting them in the community, at home, and at school. The students expressed that when given an opportunity to speak, they are able to convey a world that is radically different from the middle-class suburbia of upward social mobility and high achievement.

The students in this study spoke about complex learning environments that were greatly affected by the problems that they were confronted with at home. Matt reflected on the loss of his mother and how it is impacting his motivation to do well in school. Jennifer described the difficulty of attending school when her mother has kicked her out of the house numerous times. She explained how she was bouncing around from relatives' and friends' houses. With nowhere to go, Jessica explained her lack of care about graduation. Thalia expressed her problems associated with living in a home where there is frequent drug abuse. She noted that even though that is her home, her entire life it never felt that way because of the transient feeling of adults who come and go through the house. These admissions show the complex nature of students attending school while trying to live in dysfunctional settings.

All of the students had encountered some form of difficulty that hindered their performance in school. The drug and alcohol abuse they witnessed and heard about,

students disrupting the learning environment in classrooms, problems with teachers, instruction that was nonengaging, and the minimization of individuality through restrictive rules and policies all contributed to their learning environments being compromised. They negotiated and coped with the difficulties on their own, oftentimes without any input from adults.

Unfortunately, rather than recognizing what students have to say and making changes based on their experiences in school, all too often their concerns are either completely disregarded or not given the specific attention that is needed to remedy the problems. However, by examining their introspective perspectives, much can be learned from what MA urban students have to say. The effort of listening to their narratives offers insight into what the educational research community can do to better address their needs and build schools that provide them with adequate skills that will help them escape the clutches of poverty and despair found in the City of Rialto.

Lastly, the process of allowing students to reflect on issues and concerns significant to their lives, consistent with LatCrit, is a source of pride to them. The students who were engaged in this study indicated that this process was liberating to them. It offered them an honest avenue to vent concerns that they kept private. They expressed a sincere desire to have more opportunities to be able to dialogue with a secondary source on the issues that confront them in their lives and at school. The critical aspects of this research are that the students' narratives are needed to understand and challenge the problems that MA urban students face in order to provide more equitable forms of education.

Implications

Trying to enact educational reform for students in urban California high schools is no simple task. In urban areas, there have been decades of educational reform measures based on increasing academic achievement that have been mired in failure (Cotton, 2001). Usually, the common denominator of blame is placed on the students and their families in a cultural deficit model that has pervaded students of color in urban areas over the last 50 years (Banks, 2004). Another source of blame commonly pointed out is the teachers, due to their inability to get the students to perform at higher academic levels (Howard, 2006). In this era of blame and degradation, there continues to be an autocratic model led by national/state politicians and bureaucrats that excludes teachers, students, and their families from the discussion about how to improve schools in urban centers. The result has been a series of failed attempts that has brought little to no change in getting MA students in urban areas to achieve at higher levels. According to Leistyna (2002),

If silenced voices are never heard from, then oppressive institutions and identities remain virtually unchallenged. It is crucial that multiculturalism gets beyond the politeness muzzle of solely affirming diversity, which discourages individuals from intellectually rigorous discussions. This is not intended to be an argument against acknowledging where people came from, being sensitive to the plight of others, or creating a safe environment of dialogue. Rather, it's simply a contention that without critical engagement, sensitivity alone cannot adequately address what needs to be changed in schools and society. (p. 22)

Recommendations

This study focused on what MA students had to say about their lives and the experiences in school that influenced them. From their narratives, recommendations can be made in the following areas: (a) improving economic conditions in urban areas to ensure paths of upward mobility for MA residents and (b) applying successful reforms from other high schools that large percentages of MA students attend. These recommendations are consistent with the main contention of this study that true reform of schools in California urban centers must include elements (economy and increased social/political participation) that exist outside of the school.

Ensuring upward economic mobility patterns for California urban communities. The central cause of problems in urban schools that MA students attend is the poverty that exists amongst families and neighborhoods in these areas (Anyon, 2005). As mentioned previously, the problem of poverty in urban centers is the cyclical dynamic in which generations are engulfed in economic conditions that stymie individuals' efforts to make their lives better. Without a definitive path to enhance residents' economic position, entire urban areas become bastions of despair and wrought. In order to reverse this repetitive trend, there must be a concentrated effort at the federal and state level that consists of the following.

First and foremost is the need for jobs that pay decent wages. In urban areas, the majority of jobs are in the service and retail sectors of the economy. Many of these jobs pay entry-level wages that do not allow individuals to carve out lives where what they earn can support the basic economic necessities, such as purchasing a home or raising children. An example of this common pattern of poverty-based wages is the jobs made

available by the retail giant Wal-Mart. In 2009, the average pay of a full-time Wal-Mart employee was \$25,120. Of these full-time employees, nearly half were eligible for food stamps, WIC (Women, Infants and Children program), and state utility vouchers.

To remedy the problem of low-paying work, there must be a change to both federal and state wage policies. One of the solutions to this problem would be a significant raise in the federal minimum wage. Adjusted for inflation in 2009, those who earned a salary at \$7.25 an hour made \$13,920 a year, well below the poverty line for a family of three. Raising the minimum wage to \$11.00 an hour would allow for 60% of the workforce to see a noticeable difference (\$21,120) in wages. This change in federal wage policy would be a major step in alleviating poverty in urban areas and would also serve as a boost to educational achievement. Anyon (2005) explained,

Parents who moved out of poverty reported having more time to spend with their children, and researchers identified better parenting behavior. Researchers also identified as important to both parents and children the psychological effects of not being poor. Poverty puts stress on families, which increases the likelihood of children developing behavioral problems. (p. 67)

Another solution for providing higher wages would be to increase participation in unions. This would be achieved by ending the Taft-Hartley Act, which has been used over the last 60 years to topple the efforts of unionization in the United States. Allowing more service- and retail-based workers in urban areas to unionize would boost wages. According to Anderson (1990), participating in a union is one of the only tools of workers throughout history to increase wages. Jones maintained that from 1961 to 2005, union wages were 26.7% higher than those for unorganized workers.

Failing to address the macroeconomic problems of urban centers has been commonplace in the efforts to deal with low-performing urban school district. The traditional approach of reforming urban schools has always involved a bottom-up model that usually focuses on school-based reforms involving staff reorganization, increased allocation of funds, changes in curriculum, and school closure. These measures have largely been unsuccessful due to the downward spiral of poverty in urban communities. Without addressing the economic needs of urban communities, these problems will continue to persist and another generation of MA students will be faced with the sad reality of not having access to a better life.

New perspectives on change in urban California high schools. To help curb the negative associations of secondary school environments in urban areas for Latino students, schools must provide the kind of meaningful experiences that are part of what researchers identify as the characteristics of effective schools (Losey, 1995; Solórzano, 1995; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1999). These schools have clear and consistent rules, expectations, and goals, both academic and disciplinary. They put a concentrated effort on high academic achievement. Even more important is that they have apparatuses in place that effectively monitor student progress to prevent failure. In these schools there is a high population of teachers who came from similar home environments as their students and care about how their students develop as individuals. Administrative leadership at these schools is consistent with a vision to promote unconventional and innovative practices that take into account their student populations.

From the experiences of the participants, it is clear that RHS does not meet the characteristics of an effective school. Systemically, RHS is a functional disaster. Bold

measures must be taken in order to reverse the disturbing trend of low achievement at this institution. From the information taken from the students and the experience that the researcher has as an instructor at this school, the following recommendations must be adhered to:

1. *Make consistency a priority.* For the class of 2012, a commitment must be made by the Rialto Unified School District to do everything possible to maintain the current leadership team at RHS intact. Making this commitment would put an end to the current period of inconsistency that has enveloped RHS. The result of this action would allow for the faculty and students to have faith in the systems and policies that are enacted, because they will know that consistent voices will be there to back them up.
2. *Teach to understand the students.* Systemically, it is often the practice of educators, not just at RHS, to employ teaching styles that promote the idea that the students should understand what they are trying to explain. It is the opinion of the participants involved in this study that this process should be reversed in order for students to be more connected to the classroom environment. By teaching to understand the students, more mental and emotional connections will be made to make instruction more illuminating and creative.
3. *Put more trust in students.* One of the biggest frustrations for educators at RHS is that they want their students to trust their instruction and advice when the school's security actions promote an environment that leads to mistrust and suspicion. The participants in this study contended that if some of the security measures were geared down, they would be more accepting of the direction of staff and administration.

4. *Let students be proud!* Out of fear of the students, many of RHS's schoolwide activities have been cancelled or have been refused by administration. Without these activities, it has been the collective acceptance of the students that there is no school pride at RHS. By enacting activities such as schoolwide pep rallies, tailgating before football games, concerts on campus, and staff/student intramural games, there would be more buy-in by the students that RHS is theirs.

Somewhere in an urban high school in California, there is an MA student sitting at a desk in a classroom that is overcrowded, listening to a teacher who is delivering authoritative-based instruction that he tuned out years ago. When he looks around the room, he sees students who abuse alcohol and drugs, belong to gangs and/or party crews, and come from dysfunctional family units similar to his. When he looks out the window, he knows that he lives in a community where the chance for him to succeed is limited. He knows this because he has family members who have lived in the same area for years and continue to live in poverty. Suddenly, he begins to realize that his life path has been negatively influenced by the city he lives in, the school he has been taught in, and the friends he has been raised with. For this student, the only real hope lies in his own ability to overcome the myriad obstacles that lie in front of him.

This study found compelling evidence that schools must do more to address the historical, social, economic, and power relationships in society that influence MA students' opportunity to view education as an avenue of progress. The narratives presented in this study are persuasive evidence that the voices of the MA students in urban areas need to be heard in order to gain a true understanding of what is going on in these schools and what can be done to reform them. It is my hope that the knowledge

that we gain from the students can implore those involved with enacting change in schools to create a platform where a new generation of MA students can have their dreams realized.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Parental Consent Form

Sept 2010

Dear Rialto High School Parent

As part of the requirements of completing my doctoral degree in Educational Justice in the College of Education at the University of Redlands, I am working on my dissertation and am conducting research at Rialto High School. The purpose of this study is to explore the voices of ten senior Mexican students. Their explanations will highlight the influences both inside and outside of school that has either hindered or supported their efforts in school. Student voices are important to informing the school community as to what it can do to better support students. The overarching research question is what do urban Latino students want educators, policy makers, and the general public to know about their experiences in school

Your student has been asked to participate in this study based on their responses on a fixed question essay. Approximately, ten students from Rialto High School will be asked to be participants in a three interviews that will last 45-60 minutes in length. The interviews will be conducted around the student's availability and will by no means have any impact on their grade.

The results of this study will be used to identify factors that either impact or impede Latino student performance in California urban high schools. It is possible that the results of this study will contribute to the scant research that is available on the lived experiences of Latino students in urban high schools.

As a participant in this study, your child's identity will be kept confidential at all times. The identity of your child will never be released anywhere in the final report. With you and your student permission, I would like to tape record the interviews. These interviews will be transcribed so that your child's experiences can be examined more carefully. You and your child will be given the opportunity to review a summary of the findings.

Your student is under no obligation to participate in the study. Your student's participation is entirely voluntary. A decision not to participate will not affect you or your student's relationship with Rialto High School, or the University of Redlands.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or your confidentiality you can contact Dr. Ron Morgan at the University of Redlands at 909-793-2121 or Frank Jimenez at Rialto High School at 909-421-7500.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information above and give consent to your student being involved in the set of interviews produced by this study.

Please keep a copy of this form for your records. Your student may also withdraw from this study at any time without fear or reprisal. Thank you for assisting us in this study.

Sincerely,

Frank Jimenez
Faculty Member
RHS

Parent/Guardian Signature

Student Signature

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and tell me a little about yourself
2. How would you describe your experiences at Rialto High School over the last three years
3. What have you enjoyed the most about Rialto High School
4. What have you enjoyed the least about Rialto High School
5. What have been some of your greatest successes? Greatest challenges in school?
6. What stands out most about your favorite teachers? Least favorite?
7. What are some things that go on in school that most supports the students at Rialto High School? What do you believe goes on at Rialto High School that limits students' performance?
8. What do you think Rialto High School should do in order to support students from different backgrounds and ethnicities?